

# REPENTANCE

*I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent,  
ye shall all likewise perish. (Luke 13:3, 5)*



J. Thornton

# REPENTANCE

EXPLAINED AND ENFORCED

A SERIOUS APPEAL TO EVERY MAN'S CONSCIENCE  
ON ITS NATURE, NECESSITY, AND EVIDENCES

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likewise perish.* – Luke 13:5

BY J. THORNTON

1834

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BEING

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WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION AND APPENDIX

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H. D. Williams, M.D., Ph.D.

President, The Old Paths Publications, Inc.

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW HAVEN EDITION

The frequent calls for the following work, and the testimony borne to its merits, by many faithful and experienced clergymen, who have made use of it in their parishes, have induced the publisher to offer a new edition, in the present cheap and convenient form.

The principal portion of the Author's Preface, being wholly inapplicable to the state of things in this country, it has been deemed advisable to retain only so much of it as may be necessary to explain the object of the work. With this omission, and the addition of a few short forms of prayer, which may be found convenient and useful in directing the devotions of the honest and anxious inquirer, this edition presents the work precisely in its original form. The six chapters which constitute the entire body of the work, remain without the slightest alteration.

It was the design of the author of this work, to furnish a plain and concise treatise on one of the most important subjects connected with the doctrines of the gospel: – "to open the nature – to prove the necessity – and to point out the means and evidences of evangelical repentance." "Many (the author admits) have written well on the doctrine of repentance; but the subject is mingled with others, in voluminous works." He felt the necessity, therefore, of preparing a treatise on this all-important topic, in a small compass, and in a plain style – that it might thus obtain a general circulation among all classes of people. The giving away or lending of books of this description, is among the means of promoting the cause of religion at the present day; and the author correctly remarks, that "those who diligently and prudently use these means, will seldom fail to see some happy effects produced; and much of the seed which is thus sown, may

## INTRODUCTION

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spring up when the hands that scattered it are mouldering in the dust."

"If this small work (adds the author) should be blessed of God as a means of exciting a deep and serious concern about the ONE THING NEEDFUL, in any who receive it, I shall think myself well rewarded. May that Being, from whom cometh every blessing, cause the influence of his grace to accompany it to many hearts."

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **ON THE STATE OF THE IMPENITENT**

I will tell you, reader, in the beginning, what is my design in this little book: I do not intend to amuse you with curious questions, or engage you in fierce disputes, and vain janglings; but to show you the things that belong to your peace. You must soon die, and bid farewell to the world. You are gliding down the stream of time, into a shoreless and bottomless ocean. It is clear, from the Word of God, that after death you must be either eternally happy, or eternally miserable. It is as plain as words can make it, that if you go on hardened in sin to the last, your precious immortal soul will be certainly lost, and lost forever. I therefore beg your serious attention to the subject of repentance. No subject is more frequently and urgently pressed upon men in the Holy Scriptures. Every messenger that God has sent to perishing sinners, has brought a call to repentance. Every instance of the careless and profane cut off by death, is a loud call to the living. Every affliction in your own person, is a call from God to repentance.

Think of the value and duration of the soul. Luther declares this life to be but a little piece of life everlasting. When you have passed over your narrow span of time, you must immediately enter upon a boundless eternity. As you sow in this world, you must reap in that which is to come. While, therefore, I set before you the nature and necessity of repentance, I shall use great plainness of speech. I would keep back nothing that may be profitable to you, but faithfully declare the whole counsel of God. If I make use of strong and pointed language, it is because I most ardently wish to arouse you to a true sense of your danger, and lead you in the way of salvation. Look into the scriptures of the Old Testament, and see with what earnestness and solemnity the prophets exhorted the

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thoughtless, the worldly minded, and the wicked, to forsake their sins, and cast themselves upon the mercy of a pardoning God. Look into the New Testament, and see with what plainness, with what melting compassion, with what burning zeal, Christ and his apostles warned the guilty to flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold on eternal life.

We read in Luke 13:1-5,

*There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

Here we see how ready men are to put away the weighty concerns of religion from themselves, and think or speak only of other persons. They are willing that blame should be laid anywhere, rather than at their own doors. They shun the light, and labor to shake off those convictions which begin to trouble the conscience. In this scripture, our Lord directs his piercing words to every heart. He also teaches us the use we ought to make of any remarkable events of providence which takes place in the world, and especially in our own neighborhood. In no part of the Bible is the absolute necessity of repentance more forcibly insisted on, than in this passage. As, however, a man must see his danger before he will inquire for a refuge, and his disease, before he will seek for a remedy, I shall proceed.

### TO SHOW THE STATE OF THE IMPENITENT

To fix a deeper impression on the mind, the scriptures represent the unconverted by various comparisons. Thus we find the impenitent described as in a state of spiritual darkness, of distance from God, of deep pollution, of guilt and condemnation, of bondage and misery.

#### THE IMPENITENT ARE IN A STATE OF SPIRITUAL DARKNESS

It is said:

*This is life eternal, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. But sin is a dark cloud upon the mind, a thick veil drawn over the heart, which excludes the precious light of divine truth. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1Corinthians 2:14).*

To one who is in this state, the clearest displays of the power, wisdom, justice, and goodness of God; and the fullest manifestations of the love, compassion, faithfulness, and glory of Christ, are only as the beauties of a fine prospect to a blind man. While the understanding, which is the window of the mind, remains shut, all within must be dreary darkness. When there is no motion of love and gratitude in the heart, no breathing of fervent prayer from the lips towards God, the soul is dead in trespasses and sins. How strong, and yet how just, is the language of the prophet: *Darkness hath covered the earth, and gross darkness the people.* What can more truly describe the ignorance and stupidity of the carnal mind, than these words?

And is this, reader, your unhappy state? Be not offended at this serious question, but examine whether it be so or not. It is possible you may be proud of your

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knowledge, and yet, in spiritual matters, continue as blind as the mole that grovels in the earth. The footsteps of God are printed on the works of creation, and yet you do not see those footsteps, and admire. The hand of God is stretched out, guiding all the affairs of providence, giving you daily bread and hourly protection, and yet you do not see that hand, and thankfully adore. The face of God, the reconciled countenance of the Father, shines as in a glass, in the gospel, and yet you do not see it, and heartily rejoice. The unsearchable riches of Christ, and the everlasting glories of heaven, are opened by the promises, and still you neither see their value, nor seek them. Are not these proofs that the understanding is darkened? Seneca, in a letter to a friend, says, "My wife keeps a poor silly girl, who all of a sudden lost her sight; and (which may seem incredible, but is very true) she does not know that she is blind; but is every now and then asking her governess to lead her abroad, saying the house is dark. Now what we laugh at in this poor creature, we may observe happens to us all. No man knows that he is covetous or insatiable. Yet with this difference, the blind seek somebody to lead them, but we are content to wander without a guide."

If you beheld a man walking unconcerned near the edge of a deep whirlpool, would you not think him blind or mad? Would you not fly to snatch him back from destruction? And what can be a more full proof of spiritual blindness, than a total indifference to the dangers that threaten the soul? If fire comes so near your house or goods, that you have reason to fear they will be consumed, you use every means to secure them. But though the fire of God's wrath is kindling to destroy the soul, you neither dread nor see the danger. If the mind were not grossly darkened, how could you thoughtlessly dance and sport on the borders of the bottomless pit? It is true, light is come into the world, you live amidst the full blaze of gospel day, and yet you love darkness rather than light.

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*O, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. (Luke 19:42).*

### THE IMPENITENT ARE IN A STATE OF DISTANCE FROM GOD

In the scriptures all are represented as wanderers from God.

*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way. (Isaiah 53:6). We have forsaken the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (Jeremiah 2:13).*

Since Adam fell, every son and daughter of Adam is averse to good and inclined to evil. Not only is the understanding darkened, but the will is perverted, and the affections are corrupted. Instead of seeking happiness from God, the everlasting spring of all blessings, we naturally seek it in the foolish devices and imaginations of our own hearts.

This distance from God, our Lord sets forth in a just comparison, Matthew 7:13 and 14.

*Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat.*

Let me beg you to pay a particular attention to this remarkable scripture. In the broad way, there are many separate paths, which all run to the same dreadful end. The inclinations and passions of ungodly men may lead them to different follies and vices, while they are all living without Christ and far from righteousness. In the broad way is the path of *gaiety*, full of amusements and diversions. What glittering toys! what alluring vanities! what tempting baits! are here held out to catch the careless, or to entice and delude the young. This flowery path, furnished so plentifully with enchanting

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charms, is traveled by all who are *lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God*. Near the path of *gaiety*, is the path of *profligacy*, in which are prodigals, wasting their substance in riotous living; adulterers and drunkards, glorying in their shame; liars and swearers, whose mouths are full of falsehood, cursing, and bitterness; gamesters and thieves, who live by plunder and violence, neither fearing God, nor regarding man. In the broad way, is the path of *self-righteousness*. This indeed is very lofty, and has a fair and showy appearance, but it is exceedingly dangerous. Here are the proud and high-minded, who boast of their good works, and dream of obtaining heaven by their own fancied merit. In the broad way are the crooked paths of *deceit*, full of traps and snares, and covered pit-falls. Here travel smooth-tongued dissemblers, and painted hypocrites. The path of covetousness is crowded with sordid worldlings, heaping up riches and lading themselves with thick clay. Now, all these paths lead to destruction. This is not any airy fancy, but a certain fact. The words of Christ will be found true, whether you believe them or not. Consider, reader, whether you are not yet in this broad way. It is a thing which may be known, and ought to be determined without any delay. Perhaps you have passed from one path to another, but are still rushing on in the downward and dangerous road. O, stop, presumptuous sinner, in your mad career! With deepest concern, and the tenderest affection, I would admonish and persuade you. If it were possible for me to save you by force, as the angel laid hold of Lot to lead him out of Sodom, I would gladly do it. But all I can do is, to reason with you, and try every argument and motive the most likely to reach the understanding, and touch the heart. It is probable you have heard many a loud call, and felt many a sharp check, and yet you drive on with fury! Whither are you moving with such hasty strides? What will be the end of your present course? Ah! you are fast going,

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perhaps far gone toward eternal perdition! There is but a step between you and death; and not a step between death and despair! The voice of heaven calls you to turn to God, from whom you have so deeply revolted. Except you be converted, *and become as a little child, you can in no wise enter into the kingdom of God.*

### THE IMPENITENT ARE IN A STATE OF DEEP POLLUTION

There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness. It has been said, "Man is a polished mirror, with one slight speck, vanity; and that speck is wiped off by death." According to this fine flattering comparison, sin, it seems, must not be called a blot, nor even a stain, but a speck, a slight speck. According to this fine flattering comparison, sin, it seems, must not be called a blot, nor even a stain, but a speck, a *slight* speck. Let us now examine what the word of God says respecting human nature, in its present state. He who sees into the heart, and will be the judge of all in the last day, must be allowed capable of giving the most just account of man. Turn to Genesis 6:5-12.

*And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

If it should be thought this passage is a proof of the depravity of those only, who lived before the flood, turn to Job 15:14-16.

*What is man, that he should be clean? and he that is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?*

## CHAPTER 1: ON THE STATE OF THE IMPENITENT

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Our Lord, who perfectly knew what was in man, opens that fountain of corruption, that forge of iniquity – the carnal heart. Mark 7:21-23.

*For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.*

Nor can it be truly said, that some are free from depravity and sin. Every branch from the stock of Adam is corrupt, though every branch does not bring forth the same quantity of bad fruit. For proof of this, look into Romans 3:9-12.

*What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*

Examine with care the scriptures just repeated. Here is a painting of man, drawn by hands which could not err! It is not suited to flatter self-love and vanity. Sin does not appear as a slight speck; it is the dark coloring that overspreads the whole piece. Do not turn away with levity or scorn, as if it in no way concerned you. I have purposely held up this picture to your view, that you may try if you cannot perceive your own likeness. Yes! you need only look attentively, and you will find every line and every feature, every blot and every blemish in yourself. We may say of the scriptures, which I have been setting before you,

No glass can represent the face More clearly, than these words your case.

## **REPENTANCE EXPLAINED AND ENFORCED**

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Chilo, one of the Greek wise men, when he was at the point of death, called his friends to him, and said he could find nothing to repent of, in all his past life; not one fault, except in a single instance, leaning a little too favorably to a friend in judgment. How blind must that man be who cannot see scarlet! Instead of saying you see nothing amiss in your past life, while you examine the scriptures, have you not reason to express yourself in the words of Job to the LORD, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee?" Are you not fully convinced, that, unless you are washed in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, and created anew in the image of Christ, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven?

### **THE IMPENITENT ARE IN A STATE OF GUILT AND CONDEMNATION**

It is awful to see a man, who has broken the laws of his country, trembling in his chains, as he hears the sentence which declares him guilty. Condemned to die for his crimes, he feels a thousand horrors, before the hour of execution comes. But that man is in a far more dreadful condition, whom the sentence of the divine law dooms to eternal misery. God, as a God of justice, will not suffer His authority to be trampled upon by the wicked, without calling them to an account for it. Sin, says the apostle John, is the transgression of the law. And God keeps a book of remembrance, in which every vicious deed, every idle word, and every sinful thought, is registered. Now consider that it is said, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law, to do them." And can you believe this without trembling? Is there nothing to alarm you in the wrath of the Almighty? Can you sleep undisturbed, in carnal ease, while the curse of the most high God hangs over your guilty head? But, perhaps, you think yourself clear of the charge brought against you. When the words of the law are repeated, you are ready to cry, "All these things have I kept from my youth up: I never

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committed theft, adultery, nor murder.” But is it not possible, you may be too hasty in this matter? Take the trouble of weighing what Christ says of the law in Matthew 5:22-35. There you will find, that slightly uttering the name of God, is profaneness; a wanton look, is adultery; anger, without a just cause, is murder; a grasping eagerness after the world, is covetousness and idolatry. By proceeding in this way, you will be convinced, that, although men’s notions of duty and sin are very narrow, *God’s commandments are exceeding broad*. If the scriptures are to be believed, it is an undeniable truth, that, by the deeds of the law shall no man living be justified. Not the least room is left for self-righteous pretenses and pleas. Every mouth is stopped, and the whole world is become guilty before God. There is no way of escaping the awful judgments of God, but by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 8:1. If you remain still in impenitence and unbelief, you are yet under the curse.

*He that believeth not, is condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on him. (John 3:18-36).*

### **THE IMPENITENT ARE IN A STATE OF BONDAGE AND MISERY**

How wretched was the condition of the Israelites in Egypt, when they were not only under the iron rod of Pharaoh, the great tyrant, but also under the smarting scourges of those petty tyrants, the task masters! Well might they sigh and sicken over their hard labors and unpitied woes; but the state of unconverted men is far worse. They sell themselves to do the vilest drudgery. They are the slaves of Satan, and the servants of sin.

Paul declares that those who oppose themselves to the gospel are led captive by the devil at his will. And whither are you likely to be conducted by such a leader? What reward can you expect to receive from such a master? He will draw you on, by little and little, into his

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snares and fetters, till you are as fast bound as if girt with chains of brass. He will promise many sweets, and give you the apples of Sodom; he will show you the glories of the world, and plunge you in the horrors of despair.

The apostle Peter speaks of some who boast of their liberty, and yet are the servants of corruption. Such persons yield up their powers and members, as instruments of unrighteousness, to sin. Romans 6:13. And, O, what a wretched state is this! Yet every impenitent man is tied down by the base customs of an evil world, and given up to serve divers lusts and pleasures, those cruel task-masters which are never satisfied.

Let it never be forgotten, that sorrow follows sin, as the shadow does the substance. Peter joins together *the bond of iniquity and the gall of bitterness*. Solomon says, *The way of transgressors is hard; and truly such as travel in that way, not only forsake their own mercies, but multiply their miseries at every step*. Be not deceived with appearances. While men are so jovial in their revels, how often, even when the face is gay, is the heart sad! Colonel Gardiner, while he was eagerly pursuing the vanities and follies of the world, appeared always so full of life and spirit, that he got the name of the *happy rake*; but, after he became a new man, he declared, that, at the very time when he seemed so merry that others envied his pleasures, he was often so miserable in his own mind, as to wish himself a dog! It was a saying of Augustine, "The pleasures of sin are momentary; but its punishments are eternal." These pleasures, even while they last, are mixed with bitterness.

I grant that there are some, who seem so completely stupefied, as not in the least to feel their wretchedness. But a time is coming, that will awake them from sleep, and put all their dreams to flight. Hear the prosperous worldling saying to himself,

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*Soul, thou has much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry. Luke 12:19.*

But hold, vain boaster! those goods are not thy own. He who lent them, has not given up His right, nor forgotten His claim. Those many years set down in thy reckoning, are not written in the book of God's decrees. Hark! a messenger knocks at the door. *This night thy soul is required of thee!* Instead of taking thy ease, now go take thy trial. Amidst all the stores prepared for the perishing body, what provision hast thou for the immortal soul? Alas, poor wretch! thou hast had no shelter for it, but a refuge of lies; no clothing, but filthy rags; no food but empty husks.\* (\*Boston's Fourfold State.) O miserable condition, for the soul to be hurried unpardoned, unpurified, and unprepared, into the presence of a righteous and all-seeing Judge!

### THE PROMOTION OF SELF-EXAMINATION AND HUMILITY

If such as has just been described is the state of the impenitent, let me entreat you, reader, to examine whether it be your present condition.

*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8).*

And believe me, there is no kind of deception, into which you are so likely to fall, and which is so dangerous, as self-deception. When you are warned against it, do not imagine the caution is unnecessary. A well-known writer has justly observed, "That it is as easy to deceive ourselves without perceiving it, as it is difficult to deceive others without its being perceived." Consider what Christ says to the church at Laodicea:

*Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not*

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*that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: (Revelation 3:17).*

Do you desire to know how it is that men deceive themselves, as to their own state?

They call things by false names, and dress them in false colors.

Sin, though in itself black as hell, is whitened over with fine words and fair pleas. The most extravagant and mischievous outrages are softly termed the frolics of youth. Vain conversation, bubbling into frothy levity, or breaking out into filthy lewdness, is called harmless mirth. A compliance with idle fashions and dangerous amusements, is called seeing and knowing the world. Drinking, gaming, swearing, and Sabbath-breaking are a *gay life*. On the other hand, pious men are named sour bigots, or sly hypocrites. Religion is termed a melancholy thing; and a strict regard to it, madness.

*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! (Isaiah 5:20).*

Beware you do not fall under this woe. Let every disguise be torn away. Be willing to know the worst of yourself, that you may avoid delusion. I dare say you do not wholly deny your sin; but do you not spare it, and half excuse it? Perhaps your confession runs in such language as this: "I have been *rather* thoughtless, a *little* too wild; but I always intended to reform." Or it may be, you compare yourself with others, and begin to sound the Pharisee's trumpet, saying, "I am no extortioner, adulterer, nor drunkard; I have never gone the lengths that many have done; I do no one any harm; and if I be not safe, what will become of thousands?" Now, be persuaded to examine yourself by the light of God's holy law. Do not talk of what *other men are*, but of what *you ought to be*. Labor to gain a full view of the holiness and majesty of God; and

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then you will clearly perceive the infinite evil of sin, and your own depravity as a sinner. While a garment is kept in the dark, its filthiness is not seen; but bring it to the light, and every spot becomes visible.

Many are deceived as to their own state, because they are strangers to the heart.

If they keep free from gross vices and shocking crimes; if they are sober in their appetites, and honest in their dealings; if they behave decently towards their superiors, and attend constantly on public worship; they think themselves very good characters. They are whole, and need not a physician; safe, and look not for a Savior.

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9).*

Does not the experience of every day confirm these words of the prophet? What maze has such windings, what cavern has such dark retreats, what whirlpool has such dangerous deeps and violent motions, as the human heart? It is bad to have an enemy anywhere; it is worse to have one preparing schemes of mischief in your own house; but it is worst of all, to have a secret, plotting, and active working foe, within your own bosom. Though you may not be a base liar, a bold blasphemer, a beastly drunkard, or an impious scoffer; if the heart be not right with God, all must be wrong. Now look within, and see. Do not take this matter upon trust, but upon trial. I venture to declare, you will find every dark chamber of the heart, full of idols and abominations. Take the word of God as your light, and pray for the Holy Spirit as your guide, that you may examine those regions of the world within, to which you have been a stranger. Look into the imagination, and see what swarms of vain and sinful thoughts are there. Look into the understanding, and see what errors, prejudices, and delusions are there. Look into the conscience, and see what records of long forgotten sins, which must soon be read

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against you, are preserved there. Look into the affections, and see what storms of anger, fumes of pride, and flames of lust, rise there. A little time spent in close self-examination may do you more good than reading a thousand books. Sometimes an instance, or a fact drawn from life, may not only bring with it great evidence, but also fix the attention and fasten on the memory. A few years ago, two pious weavers were conversing together, and complaining of the trouble which they found from vain and evil thoughts, in the solemn duties of religion. Another person of the same business overheard them, and rushing forth said, "I always thought you two vile hypocrites, but now I know it from your own confession. For my part, I never had such vain and wicked thoughts in my life." One of the men took a piece of money out of his pocket, and put it into his hand, adding, "this shall be yours, if after you come from church next time, you can say you had not one vain thought there." In a few days he came saying, "here, take back your money, for I had not been five minutes in the church, before I began to think how many looms could be set up in it." It is for want of watching over the heart with godly jealousy, that so many are insensible of their sins. We see myriads of motes in a room when the sun shines, not one of which was beheld before.

If such as has now been described, is our condition, what cause have we for deep humiliation.

*Thus saith the Lord, I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?"*  
(Jeremiah 2:21)

Lord, what is man! where shall we find the fruits of righteousness in their season? Where now are holy love, cheerful resignation, and perfect obedience? Ah! it is mercy that has spared, year after year, the cumberer of the ground, for justice might have cut it down, and cast it into the fire.

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God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions. Where is the image of God, which consisted in knowledge and true holiness? Where is the glory which adorned the soul as it came out of the hands of its Maker? Lord, what is man! How is the gold become dim! How is the most-fine gold changed? in place of the divine image, are seen the black marks of iniquity.

Could you enter a temple in ruins, without melancholy thoughts? Would you not say, how are beauty and grandeur turned into desolation? The lamps are extinguished; the altar is overturned; *the glory is departed!* And was not man made to be a temple for God? At first the light of truth shone in his understanding; the language of praise flowed from his lips. *Lord, what is man!* How is the temple become a den of thieves! Where now is Paradise, with its blooming beauties, and sacred sweets? Speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee a lesson in humility. Where canst thou turn thine eye, or set thy foot, without finding proofs of thy depravity?

*Cursed is the ground for thy sake! Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.* (Genesis 3:17 and 18).

What are the pains which pierce the body, but the poisoned darts of sin? What are all the terrors of death, but the fruits of sin? Sin opened the sluices of divine wrath, and let into the world those floods of misery, which have spread their bitter waters over every land! Well, then, may we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, and cry, Lord,

*What is man, that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou visitest him?*

## CHAPTER 2

### ON THE NATURE OF REPENTANCE

In the last chapter, I proved that all are by nature in a state of spiritual darkness and distance from God, defiled with sin and exposed to future punishment. It is no easy matter to believe a doctrine, so grating to all the feelings with self-love fondly cherishes. Yet this is necessary, as a first step in religion; and without it, we stumble at the threshold. Having opened the way, I shall now proceed to show the nature of repentance. It is of the highest importance that we should have right sentiments on this subject. There are few persons but sometimes hear or speak of repentance. The vilest reprobates will, in their more sober moments, own the need of repentance. While men are in the very act of sinning against God, the mind is now and then struck with a thought of repentance. But we have reason to fear, there are not many who have just ideas of what the scriptures mean by this term. Some take the name for the thing, the shadow for the substance. Others think of nothing better than a slight reformation. If the wound be skinned over, they conclude it is healed. If the wild beast be chained, they are not concerned that it should be tamed. What numbers are there, who vainly imagine they have a power to produce the change required in themselves. Strangers to the corruption of the heart, and the strength of evil habits, they suppose they can forsake vice and become virtuous when they please, and *leap out of Delilah's lap into Abraham's bosom*. Sin first deceives, next stupefies, and at last destroys. While men entertain such loose, erroneous notions, trusting to their own power, and despising or neglecting the grace of God, it may be truly said, they put their repentance in the place of Christ. It is necessary therefore that we should carefully guard against every thing which leads to such delusions.

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I shall endeavor first to show,

### **THE NATURE OF TRUE REPENTANCE**

That repentance which issues in life eternal, is a change of mind, contrition of heart, and deep self-abhorrence.

#### **A SINCERE PENITENT HAS A CHANGE OF MIND**

While a sinner is in a carnal state, his views and sentiments, his hopes and fears, his aims and motives, are directly contrary to what they ought to be. He scorns substantial blessings, and catches at shadows. He refuses the heavenly manna, and according to the language of the prophet, feeds upon ashes. He rejects the pearl of great price, and rakes up despicable rubbish. The things of the spirit of God, in which alone there is true wisdom, appear foolishness to him. As his imagination gilds every thing with false colors, he is pleased where he should be disgusted, and disgusted where he ought to be please. He is like a hungry man that dreameth, and behold he eateth, but he awaketh and his soul is empty; or a thirst man that dreameth, and behold he drinketh, but he awaketh and he is faint. Isaiah 29:8.

But in repentance, a happy change takes place. He who is brought under the saving influence of divine grace, is renewed in the spirit of his mind. The eyes of his understanding are enlightened, to see the vanity of the world, the evil of sin, and the value of eternal possessions. Whatever relates to God, to Christ, and to the immortal soul, now appears in a new light.

#### **A Sincere Penitent has Right Views of God**

Once he did not like to retain God in his knowledge. He had a revolting and a rebellious heart. The law of God, requiring perfect obedience, was thought too strict. The justice of God, preparing a cup of indignation for the

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wicked, was thought too severe. The worship of God, was felt to be a weariness and an intolerable burden.

While such was the frame of the sinner's mind, no wonder he should turn away from religion with hatred and scorn. Job describes the wicked in prosperity, in the following remarkable language:

*Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him? (Job 21:14 and 15).*

One of this character hates the light, because his deeds are evil. But he who has undergone a thorough change, has new thoughts of God. He sees that he is supremely great, and infinitely gracious, worthy of the highest love and reverence, from every creature in earth and heaven. He is convinced, that the law is holy, just, and good, and even when it condemns himself, goes not a jot too far. He is ready to own, that if he had been compelled to drink the cup of wrath, and wring out its bitterest dregs, he should not have had a drop more than he deserved. In short, he perceives that God is a rock, his work is perfect, his word is pure, and all his ways are wonderful, and past finding out. And is it not evident, that the more the holiness and goodness of the Lord are seen, the blacker and viler sin will appear? "The carnal man," as a good writer observes, "is apt to think God ought to repent of making such hard laws, rather than that he himself should repent of breaking them." Instead of changing his course, and turning out of the broad into the narrow way, he acts as if God would change his councils, and give blessings where he has threatened curses. Now every true penitent has quite different views. He honors God, and abases himself in the dust. Far from fretting and murmuring against the Lord, he stands amazed at his longsuffering.

### **A Sincere Penitent has Right Views and New Thoughts of Christ**

Once Jesus appeared to him as a root out of dry ground, having no form or comeliness, to make him desired. But now his divine excellency and glory are discerned and acknowledged. He bows himself at the feet of Jesus, and looks to him as the great Shepherd, Surety, Savior, and Redeemer of his people. He beholds the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of his person, and the fullness of the Godhead in Christ. He sees all the promises and provisions of the gospel, as well as the keys of death and hell, in the mighty and faithful hands of Christ. What words can truly set forth the astonishing condescension and kindness of the Savior? "If," said Austin, "the whole sea were ink, and every blade of grass a pen, we could not fully describe the love of Christ." It is impossible to have clear views, or spiritual discoveries of the adorable Redeemer, and not to be in a considerable degree affected by them. Mr. Flavel calls repentance the tear that drops from the eye of faith, while looking to Jesus. Who can behold the Son of God coming in the flesh, laying down his life as a sacrifice, and conquering death and the powers of darkness for us, without feeling a glow of love to him? *To them that believe he is precious.*

### **A Sincere Penitent has New Thoughts of His Own Soul**

Once the boy engaged all his care. That it might be adorned and admired, pleased and pampered, he spared no pains or costs. *What shall I eat, what shall I drink, and wherewith shall I be clothed?* if not the cry of his lips, was the language of his heart. But now being enlightened from above, he beholds the unspeakable worth of the immortal soul, and his chief concern is its salvation. O, says he, I have played the fool, and erred exceedingly in providing for the flesh, and neglecting the better part – the never dying spirit! How shall I be delivered from the wrath to come? *What shall I do to be saved?* If my house were burnt

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down, I might get another; if my friends were cut off, I might procure new ones; if my health were destroyed, it might be restored; but if my soul be lost, it can never be recovered, and will be utterly undone. Such are the views of a true penitent!

And let me ask, are your thoughts of God, of Christ, and of your own soul, very different from what they once were? Without such a change of mind, there cannot be genuine repentance.

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17).*

I do not say that repentance is always produced by the same means, or in the same manner. In one instance, the mind is changed, as a river gradually drawn into a fresh channel; and in another, as a river turned into a new course, by the shock of an earthquake. Such was the difference between the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, and that of Lydia.

### **REPENTANCE IS CONTRITION OF HEART**

The prophets of old called the Jews a stiff-necked, stout-hearted, and rebellious people. How many in the present day answer to this description! Though we warn them, admonish them, entreat them, and thunder aloud in their ears the threatenings of the law; though we show them the nearness of death, the certainty and solemnity of the last judgement, the transporting happiness of heaven, and the endless, unutterable misery of hell – they remain unaffected and unconcerned! They sleep like Jonah! while the tempest, which their own sins have raised, threatens them with instant destruction. How awful is it to see this daring presumption, the unfeeling stupidity, continued to the last hour of life! "There are some persons," says Mr. Simpson, "so hardened in sin, and so totally given up of God, that neither sickness nor death can make any