Doctrine of Repentance

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THE EPISTLE TO THE READER

CHRISTIAN READER,

The two great graces essential to a saint in this life are faith and repentance. These are the two wings by which he flies to heaven. Faith and repentance preserve the spiritual life just as heat and radical moisture presserve the natural. The grace which I am going to discuss is repentance.

Chrysostom thought it was the most appropriate subject for him to preach before the Emperor Arcadius.[1] Augustine caused the penitential psalms to be written before him as he lay upon his bed, and he often perused them with tears. Repentance is never out of season; it is as frequently used as the artificer's tool or the soldier's weapon. If I am not mistaken, practical points are more necessary in this age than controversial and polemical.

I thought to smother these meditations in my desk. But conceiving them to be of great concern at this juncture of time, I rescinded my first resolution and have now exposed them to critical view.

Repentance is purgative; do not fear the working of this pill. Strike your soul, said Chrysostom; strike it and it will escape death by that stroke. How happy it would be if we were more deeply affected with sin, and our eyes swam in their orb. We may clearly see the Spirit of God moving in the waters of repentance, which though troubled, are yet pure. Moist tears dry up sin and quench the wrath of God. Repentance is the cherisher of piety, the procurer of mercy. The more regret and trouble in spirit we have first at our conversion, the less we shall feel afterwards.

Christians, do you have a sad resentment of other things and not of sin? Worldly tears fall to the earth, but godly tears are kept in a bottle (Psa 56.8). Do not judge holy weeping as superfluous. Tertullian thought he was born for no other end but to repent. Either sin must drown or the soul must burn. Let it not be said that repentance is difficult. Things that are excellent deserve labor. Will a man not dig for gold in the ore, even though it makes him sweat? It is better to go with difficulty to heaven than with ease to hell. What would the damned give so that they might have a herald sent to them from God to proclaim mercy upon their repentance? What volleys of sighs and groans would they send up to heaven? What floods of tears would their eyes pour out? But it is now too late. They may keep their tears to lament their folly, sooner than to procure pity. O that we would therefore, while we are on this side of the grave, make our peace with God! Tomorrow may be our dying day; let this be our repenting day. How we should imitate the saints of old who embittered their souls and sacrificed their lusts, and put on sackcloth in the hope of having white robes. Peter baptized himself with tears; and that devout lady Paula (of whom Jerome writes), like a bird of paradise, bemoaned herself and humbled herself to the dust for sin.

Besides our own personal miscarriages, the deplorable condition of the land calls for a contribution of tears. Have we not lost much of our pristine fame and renown? The time was, when we sat as princess among the provinces (Lam. 1.1), and God made the sheaves of other nations bow down to our sheaf (Gen 37.7). But has not our glory fled away like a bird (Hos 9.11)? And what severe dispensations are yet to come we cannot tell. Our black and hideous vapors having ascended, we may fear loud thunderclaps should follow. And will not all this bring us to our senses and excite in us a spirit of humiliation? Shall we sleep at the top of the mast when the winds are blowing from all the quarters of heaven? O let not the apple of our eye cease (Lam. 2.18)!

I will not launch any further into a prefatory discourse, but ask that God would add a blessing to

this work. May he so direct this arrow that, though shot at rovers, it may hit the mark. That some sin may be shot to death, will be the ardent prayer of him who is

The well-wisher of your soul's happiness,

THOMAS WATSON

25 May 1668

Chapter One

1. A PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE

Saint Paul, was falsely accused of sedition by Tertullus: “We have found this man a troublesome fellow, and a worker of sedition” (Act 24.5). And so Paul makes an apology for himself before Festus and King Agrippa in Chapter 26 of the Book of Act.

Paul proves himself as an orator. He courts the king (1) by his gesture: he stretched forth his hands, as was the custom of orators; (2) by his manner of speech: “I think of myself as happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself before you, touching upon all the things of which I am accused” (Act 26.2).

Paul then addresses three things, and in so deep a strain of rhetoric as almost to have converted King Agrippa:

(1) He speaks of the manner of his life before his conversion: “I lived as a Pharisee after the strictest sect of our religion” (v.5). During the time of his unregeneracy, he was zealous for traditions; his false fire of zeal was so hot that it scorched all who stood in his way; “I shut up many of the saints in prison” (v.10).

(2) He speaks of the manner of his conversion: “I saw in the road a light from heaven, beyond the brightness of the sun” (v.13). This light was none other than what shone from Christ’s glorified body. “And I heard a voice speaking to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’” The body being hurt, the head in heaven cried out. Paul was amazed at this light and voice, and fell to the earth: “I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said, ‘I am Jesus whom you persecute’” (v. 1415). Paul was now departed from himself. All opinion of self-righteousness vanished and he grafted his hope of heaven upon the stock of Christ’s righteousness.

(3) He speaks of the manner of his life after his conversion. He who had been a persecutor before now became a preacher: “Arise, for I have appeared to you for this purpose: to make you a minister and a witness of those things which you have seen” (v. 16). When Paul, this “vessel of election,” was savingly worked upon, he labored to do as much good as previously he had done hurt. He had persecuted saints to death before; now he preached sinners to life. God first sent him to the Jews at Damascus and afterwards enlarged his commission to preach to the Gentiles. And the subject he preached was this, “That they should repent and turn to God, and do works fit for repentance” (v. 20). A weighty and excellent subject!

I shall not dispute the priority, whether faith or repentance goes first. Doubtless repentance shows itself first in a Christian’s life. Yet I am apt to think that the seeds of faith are first worked in the heart. When a burning taper is brought into a room, the light shows itself first, but the taper preceded the light. In the same way, we see the fruits of repentance first, but the beginnings of faith were there before.

What inclines me to think that faith is seminally in the heart before repentance is because repentance, being a grace, must be exercised by someone who is living. Now, how does the soul live but by faith? “The just shall live by his faith” (Heb 10.38). Therefore, there must first be some seeds of faith in the heart of a penitent; otherwise it is dead repentance and of no value.

Whether faith or repentance goes first, however, I am sure that repentance is of such importance that there can be no saving without it. After Paul’s shipwreck, he swam to shore on planks and broken pieces of the ship (Act 27.44). In Adam we all suffered shipwreck, and repentance is the only plank left us after shipwreck to swim to heaven.

It is a great duty incumbent upon Christians to solemnly repent and turn to God: “Repent, for the

kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat 3.2); "Repent therefore, and be converted so that your sins may be blotted out" (Act 3.19); "Repent of your wickedness" (Act 8.22). In the mouths of three witnesses this truth is confirmed. Repentance is a foundation grace: "Not laying again the foundation of repentance" (Heb 6.1). That religion which is not built upon this foundation must fall to the ground.

Repentance is a grace required under the gospel. Some think it legal; but the first sermon that Christ preached, indeed, the first word of his sermon, was "Repent" (Mat 4.17). And his farewell that he left when he was going to ascend was that "repentance should be preached in his name" (Luk 24.47). The apostles all beat upon this string: "They went out and preached that men should repent" (Mar 6.12).

Repentance is a pure gospel grace. The covenant of works allowed no repentance; there it was: sin and die. Repentance came in by the gospel. Christ has purchased us with his blood so that repenting sinners shall be saved. The law required personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience. It cursed all who could not come up to this: "Cursed is everyone that does not continue to do all things which are written in the book of the law" (Gal 3.10). It does not say, "He that does not obey all things, let him repent;" instead, it says "let him be cursed." Thus repentance is a doctrine that has been brought to light only by the gospel.

How is repentance worked? The manner in which repentance is worked is this:

1. Partly by the word

"When they heard this, they were pricked in their heart" (Act 2.37). The word preached is the engine God uses to effect repentance. It is compared to a hammer, and to a fire (Jer 23.29), the one to break, the other to melt the heart. How great a blessing it is to have the word dispensed, which is of such virtue! Those who put out the lights of heaven will find it hard to escape hell!

2. By the Spirit

Ministers are but the pipes and organs. It is the Holy Ghost breathing in them that makes their words effectual: "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all those who heard the word" (Act 10.44). The Spirit in the word illuminates and converts. When the Spirit touches a heart, it dissolves with tears: "I will pour out upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace ... and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn" (Zec 12.10). It is wonderful to consider what different effects the word has upon men. Some at a sermon are like Jonah: their heart is tender and they let tears fall. Others are no more affected by it than a deaf man with music. Some grow better by the word; others grow worse. The same earth which causes sweetness in the grape causes bitterness in the wormwood. What is the reason the word works so differently? It is because the Spirit of God carries the word to the conscience of one, and not to another. One has received the divine unction, and not the other (1Joh 2.20). O pray that the dew may fall with the manna: that the Spirit may go along with the word. The chariot of ordinances will not carry us to heaven unless the Spirit of God joins himself to this chariot (Act 8.29).

Chapter Two

2. COUNTERFEIT REPENTANCE

To discover what true repentance is, I will first show what it is not. There are several deceits of repentance which might occasion that saying of Augustine that "repentance damns many." He meant a false repentance: a person may delude himself with counterfeit repentance.

1. The first deceit of repentance is legal terror

Say a man has gone on in sin a long time. At last God arrests him, shows him what desperate hazard he has run, and he is filled with anguish. In a while the tempest of conscience is blown over, and he is quiet again. Then he concludes that he is a true penitent because he has felt some bitterness in sin. Do not be deceived; this is not repentance. Ahab and Judas had troubled minds. It is one thing to be a terrified sinner, and another to be a repenting sinner. Sense of guilt is enough to breed terror. Infusion of grace breeds repentance. If pain and trouble were sufficient for repentance, then the damned in hell would be the most penitent, for they are most in anguish. Repentance depends upon a change of heart. There may be terror and yet no change of heart.

2. Another deceit about repentance is resolution against sin

A person may resolve and make vows, and yet not be penitent. "You said, I will not transgress" (Jer 2.20). Here was a resolution, but see what follows: "you wander under every green tree, playing the harlot." Notwithstanding her solemn engagements, she played fast and loose with God and ran after her idols. We see by experience what protestations a person will make when he is on his sickbed, if only God would allow him to recover; yet he is as bad as ever. He shows his old heart in a new temptation.

Resolutions against sin may arise,

(1) from present extremity; not because sin is sinful, but because it is painful. This resolution will vanish.

(2) from fear of future evil, an apprehension of death and hell: "I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him" (Rev 6.8). What will a sinner not do, what vows will he not make, when he knows he must die and stand before the judgment-seat? Self-love raises a sickbed vow, and love of sin will prevail against it. Do not trust to a passionate resolution; it is raised in a storm and it will die in a calm.

3. The third deceit about repentance is leaving many sinful ways alone

It is a great matter, I confess, to leave sin. So dear is sin to a man that he would rather part with a child than with a lust: "Shall I give the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Mic 6.7). Sin may be parted with, yet without repentance.

(1) A man may part with some sins and keep others, just as Herod reformed many things that were amiss but could not leave his incest.

(2) An old sin may be left in order to entertain a new one, just as you dismiss an old servant to take another. This is exchanging a sin. Sin may be exchanged and yet the heart remain unchanged. One who was a prodigal in his youth becomes a usurer in his old age. A slave is sold to a Jew; the Jew sells him to a Turk. Here the master is changed, but he is still a slave. So a man moves from one vice to another but still remains a sinner.

(3) A sin may be left not so such from strength of grace as from reasons of prudence. A man

sees that although such a sin is for his pleasure, it is not for his interest. It will eclipse his credit, prejudice his health, and impair his estate. Therefore, for prudential reasons, he dismisses it.

True leaving of sin is when the acts of sin cease because of the infusion of a principle of grace, just as it ceases to be dark when there is an infusion of light.

Chapter Three

3. THE NATURE OF TRUE REPENTANCE (1)

I shall next show what gospel repentance is. Repentance is a grace of God's Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed. For a further amplification, know that repentance is a spiritual medicine made up of six special ingredients:

1. Sight of sin
2. Sorrow for sin
3. Confession of sin
4. Shame for sin
5. Hatred for sin
6. Turning from sin

If any one of these is left out, repentance loses its virtue.

Ingredient 1: Sight of Sin

The first part of Christ's medicine is eye-salve (Act 26.18). It is the great thing noted in the prodigal's repentance: "he came to himself" (Luk 15.17). He saw himself as a sinner and nothing but a sinner. Before a man can come to Christ he must first come to himself. Solomon, in his description of repentance, considers this the first ingredient: "if they come to themselves" (1Kng 8.47). A man must first recognize and consider what his sin is, and know the plague of his heart, before he can be duly humbled for it. The first created thing God made was light. So the first thing in a penitent is illumination: "Now you are light in the Lord" (Eph 5.8). The eye is made both for seeing and weeping. Sin must first be seen before it can be wept for.

From this I infer that where there is no sight of sin, there can be no repentance. Many who can spy faults in others see none in themselves. They cry that they have good hearts. Is it not strange that two should live together, and eat and drink together, yet not know each other? Such is the case of a sinner. His body and soul live together, work together, yet he is unacquainted with himself. He does not know his own heart, nor what a hell he carries around with him. Under a veil a deformed face is hidden. Persons are veiled-over with ignorance and self-love; therefore they do not see what deformed souls they have. The devil does with them as the falconer does with the hawk. He blinds them and carries them hooded to hell: "the sword shall strike his right eye" (Zec 11.17). Men have insight enough into worldly matters, but the eye of their mind is stricken. They do not see any evil in sin; the sword strikes their right eye.

Ingredient 2: Sorrow for Sin

I will be sorry for my sin (Psalm 38. 18)

Ambrose calls sorrow "the embittering of the soul." The Hebrew word "to be sorrowful" signifies "to have the soul," as it were, "crucified." This must be so in true repentance: "They will look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn" (Zec 12.10), as if they felt the nails of the cross sticking in their sides. A woman may as well expect to have a child without pangs as one can have repentance without sorrow. Someone who can believe without doubting, should suspect his faith; and someone who can repent without sorrowing, should suspect his repentance.

Martyrs shed blood for Christ, and penitents shed tears for sin: "she stood at Jesus' feet weeping" (Luk 7.38). See how this distillery dripped. The sorrow of her heart ran out at her eye. The brazen basin for the priests to wash in (Exo 30. 18) typified a double basin: the basin of Christ's blood we must wash in by faith, and the basin of tears we must wash in by repentance. A true penitent labors to work his heart into a sorrowing attitude. He blesses God when he can weep; he is glad of a rainy day, for he knows that it is a repentance he will have no cause to repent of. Though the bread of sorrow is bitter to the taste, it strengthens the heart (Psa 104.15; 2Cor 7. 10).

This sorrow for sin is not superficial: it is a holy agony. It is called in Scripture, a breaking of the heart: "The sacrifices of God are a broken and a contrite heart" (Psa 51.17); and a rending of the heart: "Rend your heart" (Joe 2.13). The expressions of striking on the thigh (Jer 31.19), beating on the breast (Luk 18.13), putting on sackcloth (Isa 22.12), plucking the hair (Ezra 9.3), are all but outward signs of inward sorrow. This sorrow is:

(1) To make Christ precious. O how desirable is a Savior to a troubled soul! Now Christ is Christ indeed, and mercy is mercy indeed. Until the heart is full of compunction,[2] it is not fit for Christ.

How welcome is a surgeon to a man who is bleeding from his wounds!

(2) To drive out sin. Sin breeds sorrow, and sorrow kills sin. Holy sorrow is the rhubarb to purge out the ill moods of the soul. It is said that the tears of vine branches are good to cure leprosy. Certainly the tears that drop from the penitent are good to cure the leprosy of sin. The salt water of tears kills the worm of conscience.

(3) To make way for solid comfort: "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Psa 126.5). The penitent has a wet seedtime but a delicious harvest. Repentance bursts the abscess of sin, and then the soul is at ease. Hannah, after weeping, went away and was sad no more (1Sam 1.18). God's troubling of the soul for sin is like the angel's troubling of the pool (Joh 5.4), which made way for healing.

But not all sorrow evidences true repentance. There is as much difference between true and false sorrow as between water in the spring, which is sweet, and water in the sea, which is briny. The apostle speaks of sorrowing "in a godly manner" (2Cor 7.9). But what is this godly sorrowing? There are six qualifications for it:

1. True godly sorrow is inward

It is inward in two ways:

(1) It is a sorrow of the heart. The sorrow of hypocrites lies in their faces: "they disfigure their faces" (Mat 6.16). They make a sour face, but their sorrow goes no further, like the dew that wets the leaf but does not soak to the root. Ahab's repentance was an outward show. His garments were rent but not his spirit (1Kng 21.27). Godly sorrow goes deep, like a vein which bleeds inwardly. The heart bleeds for sin: "they were pricked in their heart" (Act 2.37). As the heart bears a primary part in sinning, so it must bear a primary part in sorrowing.

(2) It is a sorrow for heart-sins, the first outbreaks and stirrings of sin. Paul grieved for the law in his members (Rom 7.23). The true mourner weeps for the stirrings of pride and lust. He grieves for the "root of bitterness" even though it never blossoms into action. A wicked man may be troubled by scandalous sins; a real convert laments heart-sins.

2. Godly sorrow is sincere

It is sorrow for the offense rather than for the punishment. God's law has been infringed, and his love abused. This melts the soul in tears. A man may be sorry, yet not repent, just as a thief is sorry when he is captured – not because he has stolen, but because he has to pay the penalty. Hypocrites grieve only for the bitter consequence of sin. I have read of a fountain that only flows on the evening before a famine. Likewise their eyes never pour out tears except when God's judgments are approaching. Pharaoh was more troubled for the frogs and river of blood than for his sin. Godly sorrow, however, is chiefly for the trespass against God, so that even if there were no conscience to strike, no devil to accuse, no hell to punish, yet the soul would still be grieved because of the prejudice done to God. "My sin is ever before me" (Psa 51.3); David does not say, "The sword threatened is ever before me," but "my sin." O that I should offend so good a God, that I should grieve my Comforter! This breaks my heart!

Godly sorrow shows itself to be sincere because when a Christian knows that he is out of the gunshot of hell and will never be damned, he still grieves for sinning against that free grace which has pardoned him.

3. Godly sorrow is faithful

It is intermixed with faith: "the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, 'Lord, I believe'" (Mar 9.24). Here was sorrow for sin checkered with faith, as if we have seen a bright rainbow

appear in a watery cloud.

Spiritual sorrow will sink the heart if the pulley of faith does not raise it up. Just as our sin is ever before us, so God's promise must ever be before us. Just as we greatly feel our sting, so we must look up to Christ, our bronze serpent.[3] Some have faces so swollen with worldly grief that they can hardly look out of their eyes. The weeping which blinds the eye of faith is not good. If faith sinks in the soul, then it is not the sorrow of humiliation but of despair.

4. Godly sorrow is a great sorrow

"In that day there shall be great mourning, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon" (Zec 12.11). Two suns set that day when Josiah died, and there was a great funeral mourning. Sorrow for sin must be boiled up to such a degree. Pectore ab imo suspiria.[4]

Question 1: Do all have the same degree of sorrow?

Answer: No, sorrow recipere magis em minus (produces greater or lesser [sorrows]). In the new birth all have pangs, but some have sharper pangs than others.

(1) Some are naturally of a more rugged disposition, of higher spirits, and are not easily brought to stoop. These must have greater humiliation, just as a knotty piece of timber must have greater wedges driven into it.

(2) Some have been more heinous offenders, and their sorrow must be suitable to their sin. Some patients have their sores opened with a needle, others with a lance. The more wicked sinners must be more bruised with the hammer of the law.

(3) Some are designed and cut out for higher service, to be eminently instrumental for God; and these must have a mightier work of humiliation pass upon them. Those whom God intends to be pillars in his church must be more hewn. Paul, the prince of the apostles, who was to be God's ensign-bearer to carry his name before the Gentiles and kings, was to have his heart more deeply lanced by repentance.

Question 2: But how great must sorrow for sin be in all?

Answer: It must be as great as for any worldly loss. Turgescunt lumina petu.[5] "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn as for an only son" (Zec 12.10). Sorrow for sin must surpass worldly sorrow. We must grieve more for offending God than for the loss of dear relations. "In that day the Lord God of hosts called for weeping, and baldness, and girding with sackcloth" (Isa 22.12): this was for sin. But in the case of the burial of the dead we find God prohibiting tears and baldness (Jer 22.10; 16.6), to intimate that sorrow for sin must exceed sorrow at the grave; and with good reason, for in the burial of the dead it is only a friend who departs, but in sin it is God who departs.

Sorrow for sin should be so great as to swallow up all other sorrow; when the pain of the gall stone and the gout meet, the pain of the stone swallows up the pain of the gout.

We are to find as much bitterness in weeping for sin as ever we found sweetness in committing it. Surely David found more bitterness in repentance than ever he found comfort in Bathsheba.

Our sorrow for sin must be such that it makes us willing to let go of those sins which brought the greatest income of profit or delight. The medicine shows itself strong enough when it has purged our disease. The Christian has a sufficient measure of sorrow when the love of sin is purged.

5. Godly sorrow in some cases is joined with restitution

If someone has wronged others in their estate by unjust and fraudulent dealing, in conscience he ought to recompense them. There is an express law for this: "he shall recompense for his trespass with the principal taken, adding a fifth to it, and giving it to the one he wronged" (Num 5.7). This is how Zacchaeus made restitution: "If I have taken anything from any man by fraud, I restore him fourfold" (Luk 19.8). When Selymus the great Turk[6] lay upon his deathbed, being urged by Pyrrhus to put to charitable use the wealth he wrongfully gained from the Persian merchants, he commanded rather that it should be sent back to the rightful owners. Should not a Christian's creed be better than a Turk's Koran? It is a bad sign when a man on his deathbed bequeaths his soul to God and his ill-gotten goods to his friends. I can hardly think God will receive his soul. Augustine said, "Without restitution, no remission." And it was a speech of old Latimer,[7] "If you do not restore goods unjustly gotten, you shall cough in hell."

Question 1: Suppose a person has wronged another in his estate and the wronged man is dead. What should he do?

Answer: Let him restore his ill-gotten goods to that man's heirs and successors. If none of them is living, let him restore them to God, that is, let him put his unjust gain into God's treasury by relieving the poor.

Question 2: What if the party who did the wrong is dead?

Answer: Then those who are his heirs ought to make restitution. Mark what I say: if there are any who have estates left to them, and they know that the parties who left them their estates had defrauded others and died with that guilt upon them, then the heirs or executors who possess those estates are bound in conscience to make restitution. Otherwise they entail the curse of God upon their family.

Question 3: If a man has wronged another and is not able to restore, what should he do?

Answer: Let him deeply humble himself before God, promising to the wronged party full satisfaction if the Lord makes him able, and God will accept the intent for the deed.

6. Godly sorrow is abiding

It is not a few tears shed in a passion that will serve the turn. Some will fall weeping at a sermon, but like an April shower, it is soon over, or like a vein that is opened and quickly stopped again. True sorrow must be habitual. O Christian, the disease of your soul is chronic and frequently returns to you; therefore you must continually dose yourself by repentance. This is sorrow that is "after a godly manner."[8]

Use: How far from repentance those are who never had this godly sorrow! Such are:

(1) The Papists, who leave out the very soul of repentance, making all penitential work consist in fasting, penance, and pilgrimages, in which there is nothing of spiritual sorrow. They torture their bodies, but their hearts are not torn. What is this but the carcass of repentance?

(2) Carnal Protestants, who are strangers to godly sorrow. They cannot endure a serious thought, nor do they trouble their heads about sin. Paracelsus[9] spoke of a frenzy that some have which makes them die dancing. Likewise, sinners spend their days in mirth; they fling away sorrow and go dancing to damnation. Some have lived many years, yet never put a drop in God's bottle; nor do they know what a broken heart means. They weep and wring their hands as if they were undone when their estates are gone, but they have no agony of soul for their sin.

There is a twofold sorrow: firstly, a rational sorrow, which is an act of the soul by which it has a

dislike of sin, and chooses any torture rather than admit sin; secondly, there is a sensitive sorrow, which is expressed by many tears. The first of these is found in every child of God; but not all have the second, which is a sorrow running out at the eye. Yet it is very commendable to see a weeping penitent. Christ considers those who are tender-eyed as great beauties; and sin may well make us weep. We usually weep for the loss of some great good; well, by sin we have lost the favor of God. If Micah wept for the loss of a false god, saying, "You have taken away my gods, and what more do I have?" (Jdg 18.24), then well may we weep for our sins which have taken the true God away from us.

Some may ask whether our repentance and sorrow must always be alike. Although repentance must always be kept alive in the soul, there are two special times when we must renew our repentance in an extraordinary manner:

(1) Before receiving the Lord's Supper. This spiritual Passover is to be eaten with bitter herbs. Now our eyes should be fresh-broached with tears, and the stream of sorrow should overflow. A repentant attitude is a sacramental attitude. A broken heart and a broken Christ well agree. The more bitterness we taste in sin, the more sweetness we taste in Christ. When Jacob wept he found God: "And he called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face" (Gen 32.30). The way to find Christ comfortably in the sacrament is to go there weeping. Christ will say to a humble penitent, as he said to Thomas: "Reach here your hand, and thrust it into my side" (Joh 20.27), and let those bleeding wounds of mine heal you.

(2) Another time of extraordinary repentance is at the hour of death. This should be a weeping season. Now is our last work to be done for heaven, and our best wine of tears should be kept for such a time. We should repent now, over having sinned so much and wept so little, that God's bag has been so full and his bottle so empty (Job 14.17). We should repent that we repented no sooner, that the garrisons of our hearts held out so long against God before they were levelled by repentance. We should repent that we did not love Christ more, that we have fetched no more virtue from him and brought no more glory to him. It should be our grief on our deathbed that our lives have had so many blanks and blots in them, that our duties have been so fly-blown with sin, that our obedience has been so imperfect, and that we have gone so lame in the ways of God. When the soul is going out of the body, it should swim to heaven in a sea of tears.

Ingredient 3: Confession of Sin

Sorrow is such a vehement passion that it must vent. It vents itself at the eyes by weeping, and at the tongue by confession: "The children of Israel stood and confessed their sins" (Neh. 9.2). "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offense" (Hos 5.15); it is a metaphor alluding to a mother who, when she is angry, leaves the child and hides her face till the child acknowledges its fault and begs pardon. Gregory Nazianzen[10] calls confession "a salve for a wounded soul."

Confession is self-accusing: "Look, I have sinned" (2Sam 24.17). Indeed, among men it is otherwise: no man is bound to accuse himself, but he desires to see his accuser. When we come before God, however, we must accuse ourselves: me me adsum qui feci in me convertite ferrum.[11] And the truth is that, by this self-accusing, we prevent Satan's accusing. In our confessions we tax ourselves with pride, infidelity, and passion, so that when Satan, who is called "the accuser of the brethren," lays these things to our charge, God will say, "They have accused themselves already; therefore, Satan, your lawsuit is dismissed; your accusations come too late." The humble sinner does more than accuse himself; as it were, he sits in

judgment and passes sentence upon himself. He confesses that he deserves to be bound over to the wrath of God. And hear what the apostle Paul says: "if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (1Cor 11.31).[12]

But have not wicked men, like Judas and Saul, confessed their sin? Yes, but theirs was not a true confession. So that our confession of sin may be right and genuine, these eight qualifications are required:

1. Confession must be voluntary

It must come like water out of a spring, freely. The confession of the wicked is extorted, like the confession of a man upon a rack. When a spark of God's wrath flies into their conscience, or they are in fear of death, then they will fall to their confessions. Balaam, when he saw the angel's naked sword, could say, "I have sinned" (Num 22.34). But true confession drops from the lips as myrrh from the tree or honey from the comb, freely. "I have sinned against heaven, and before you" (Luk 15.18): the prodigal charged himself with sin before his father charged him with it.

2. Confession must be with compunction

The heart must deeply resent it. A natural man's confessions run through him like water through a pipe. They do not affect him at all. But true confession leaves heart-wounding impressions on a man. David's soul was burdened in the confession of his sins: "as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me" (Psa 38.4). It is one thing to confess sin and another thing to feel sin.

3. Confession must be sincere

Our hearts must go along with our confessions. The hypocrite confesses his sin but still loves it, like a thief who confesses to stolen goods, yet loves stealing. How many confess pride and covetousness with their lips but roll them like honey under their tongue.[13] Augustine said that before his conversion he confessed sin and begged for power against it; but his heart whispered within him, "not yet, Lord." He was afraid to leave his sin too soon. A good Christian is more honest. His heart keeps pace with his tongue. He is convinced of the sins that he confesses, and he abhors the sins that he is convinced of.

4. In true confession a man particularizes sin

A wicked man acknowledges he is a sinner in general. He confesses his sin wholesale. His confession of sin is much like Nebuchadnezzar's dream: "I have dreamed a dream" (Dan. 2.3), but he could not tell what it was: "The thing is gone from me" (Dan. 2.5). In the same way a wicked man says, "Lord, I have sinned," but he does not know what the sin is; at least he does not remember; whereas a true convert acknowledges his particular sins. As it is with a wounded man, who comes to the surgeon and shows him all his wounds (here I was cut in the head, there I was shot in the arm…) so a mournful sinner confesses the several diseases of his soul. Israel drew up a particular charge against themselves: "We have served Baalim" (Judg. 10.10). The prophet recites the very sin which brought a curse with it: "Nor have we listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name" (Dan. 9.6). By a diligent inspection into our hearts, we may find some particular sin has been indulged; point to that sin with a tear.

5. A true penitent confesses sin in the fountain

He acknowledges the pollution of his nature. The sin of our nature is not only a privation of good but an infusion of evil. It is like rust to iron, or stain to scarlet. David acknowledges his birth-sin: "I was shaped in iniquity; my mother conceived me in sin" (Psa 51.5). We are ready to charge many of our first sins to Satan's temptations, but this sin of our nature is entirely from ourselves;

we cannot shift it off to Satan. We have a root within us that bears gall and wormwood (Deu 29.18). Our nature is an abyss and a seminary of all evil, from which those scandals that infest the world come. It is this depravity of nature which poisons our holy things; it is this which brings on God's judgments and makes our mercies stick in the birth. Oh confess sin in the fountain!

6. Sin is to be confessed with all its circumstances and aggravations

Those sins which are committed under the gospel horizon are doubtless dyed in grain.[14] Confess sins against knowledge, against grace, against vows, against experiences, against judgments. "The wrath of God came upon them and slew the fattest of them. For all this, they still sinned" (Psa 78.31-32). These are killing aggravations which accentuate and enhance our sins.

7. In confession we must so charge ourselves as to clear God

If the Lord is severe in his providences and unsheathes his bloody sword, still we must acquit him and acknowledge that he has done us no wrong. Nehemiah in confessing sin vindicates God's righteousness: "Even so, you are just in all that is brought upon us" (Neh. 9.33). Maurice the emperor,[15] when he saw his wife slain before his eyes by Phocas, cried out, "Righteous are you, O Lord, in all your ways."

8. We must confess our sins with a resolve not to repeat them

Some run from the confession of sin to the committing of sin, like the Persians who have one day in the year when they kill serpents and after that day allow them to swarm again. Likewise, many seem to kill their sins in their confessions, but afterwards let them grow as fast as ever. "Cease to do evil" (Isa 1.16). It is vain to confess, "We have done those things we should not have done," and still continue to do them. Pharaoh confessed he had sinned (Exo 9.27); but when the thunder ceased, he fell to his sin again: "he sinned still more, and hardened his heart" (Exo 9.34). Origen[16] calls confession the vomit of the soul by which the conscience is eased of that burden which lay upon it. Now, when we have vomited up sin by confession we must not return to this vomit.[17] What king will pardon a man who, after he has confessed his treason, practices new treason?

Thus we see how confession must be qualified.

Use 1: Is confession a necessary ingredient in repentance? Here is a bill of indictment against four sorts of persons:

(1) It reproves those that hide their sins, as Rachel hid her father's idols under her (Gen 31.34). Many would rather have their sins covered than cured. They do with their sins as they do with their pictures: they draw a curtain over them; or as some do with their bastards, smother them. But though men have no tongue to confess, God has an eye to see; he will unmask their treason: "I will reprove you, and set them in order before your eyes" (Psa 50.21). Those iniquities which men hide in their hearts will be written one day on their foreheads as if with the point of a diamond. Those who will not confess their sin as David did, so that they may be pardoned, will confess their sin as Achan did, so that they may be stoned. It is dangerous to keep the devil's counsel: "He that covers his sins shall not prosper" (Pro 2 8.13).

(2) It reproves those who indeed confess sin, but only by halves. They do not confess all; they confess the pennies but not the dollars. They confess vain thoughts or bad memory but not the sins they are most guilty of, such as rash anger, extortion, and uncleanness, like the man in Plutarch[18] who complained his stomach was not very good when his lungs were bad and his liver was rotten. But if we do not confess all, why should we expect God to pardon all? It is

true that we cannot know the exact catalogue of our sins, but the sins which come within our view and cognizance, and which our hearts accuse us of, must be confessed if we are to hope for mercy.

(3) It reproves those who mince and extenuate their sins in their confessions. A gracious soul labors to make the worst of his sins, but hypocrites make the best of them. They do not deny they are sinners, but they do what they can to lessen their sins: they indeed offend sometimes, but it is just their nature, and it has been such a long time. These are excuses rather than confessions. "I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord: because I feared the people" (1Sam 15.24). Saul blames the people: they would have him spare the sheep and oxen. It was an apology, not a self-indictment. It runs in the blood. Adam acknowledged he tasted the forbidden fruit, but instead of aggravating his sin he shifted it from himself to God: "The woman you gave me, she gave me from the tree and I ate" (Gen 3.12). That is, if I did not have this woman to be a tempter, I would not have transgressed. Inscripsere deos sceleri (Ovid).[19] It is a bad sin indeed that we can make no excuse for, just as it must be a very coarse wool which will not take dye. How apt we are to pare and curtail sin, and look at it through the small end of the telescope so that it appears to be only "a little cloud, like a man's hand" (1Kng 18.44).

(4) It reproves those who are so far from confessing sin that they boldly plead for it. Instead of having tears to lament it, they use arguments to defend it. If their sin is passion, they will justify it by, "I have reason to be angry" (Jon. 4.9). If it be covetousness they will vindicate it. When men commit sin they are the devil's servants; when they plead for it they are the devil's attorneys, and he will give them a fee for it.

Use 2: Let us show ourselves to be penitents by sincere confession of our sin. The thief on the cross confessed his sin: "we are indeed condemned justly" (Luk 23.41). And Christ said to him, "Today you shall be with me in paradise" (Luk 23.43). This might have been the occasion for Augustine's speech that confession of sin shuts the mouth of hell and opens the gate of paradise.

So that we may make a free and sincere confession of sin, let us consider that,

(1) Holy confession gives glory to God: "My son, give, I pray you, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to him" (Josh. 7.19). A humble confession exalts God. What a glory it is to him that out of our own mouths he does not condemn us? While we confess sin, God's patience is magnified in sparing us, and his free grace is magnified in saving such sinners.

(2) Confession is a means to humble the soul. The one who describes himself as a hell-deserving sinner will have little heart to be proud. Like the violet, he will hang down his head in humility. A true penitent confesses that he mingles sin with all he does, and therefore he has nothing to boast about. Uzziah, though a king, had leprosy on his forehead; he had enough to abase him (2Chr 26.19). So a child of God, even when he does good, still acknowledges there is much evil in that good. This lays all his feathers of pride in the dust.

(3) Confession gives vent to a troubled heart. When guilt lies boiling in the conscience, confession gives ease. It is like lancing an abscess which gives ease to the patient.

(4) Confession purges sin. Augustine called it "the expeller of vice." Sin is bad blood; confession is like opening a vein to let it out. Confession is like the Dung Gate through which all the filth of the city was removed (Neh. 3.13). Confession is like pumping at the leak; it lets out that sin which would otherwise overflow. Confession is the sponge that wipes the spots off

the soul.

(5) Confession of sin endears Christ to the soul. If I say I am a sinner, how precious will Christ's blood be to me! After Paul has confessed a body of sin, he breaks forth into a congratulatory triumph for Christ: "I thank God through Jesus Christ" (Rom 7.25). If a debtor confesses a judgment but the creditor will not exact the debt, and instead appoints his own son to pay it, will not the debtor be very thankful? So when we confess the debt, and confess that even if we were to lie forever in hell we could not pay it, but that God must appoint his own Son to lay down his blood to pay our debt, then free grace is greatly magnified and Jesus Christ is eternally loved and admired!

(6) Confession of sin makes way for pardon. No sooner did the prodigal come with a confession in his mouth, "I have sinned against heaven," than his father's heart melted towards him and he kissed him (Luk 15.20). When David said, "I have sinned," the prophet brought him a box with a pardon, "The Lord has put away your sin" (2Sam 12.13). The one who sincerely confesses sin has God's bond for a pardon: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1Joh 1.9). Why does the apostle not say that if we confess our sins, he is merciful to forgive our sins? No; he is just to forgive them because he has bound himself by a promise to forgive them. God's truth and justice are engaged in the pardoning of that man who confesses sin and comes with a penitent heart by faith in Christ.

(7) How reasonable and easy this command is to confess our sin!

(a) It is a reasonable command. For if one has wronged another, what is more rational than to confess that he has wronged him? Having wronged God by sin, how equal and consonant to reason it is that we should confess the offense.

(b) It is an easy command. What a vast difference there is between the first covenant and the second! In the first covenant it was, "if you commit sin, you die;" in the second covenant it is, "If you confess sin, you shall have mercy." In the first covenant no surety was allowed; under the covenant of grace, if we but confess the debt, Christ will be our surety.

What way could be thought of that is more ready and facile for the salvation of man than a humble confession? "Only acknowledge your iniquity" (Jer 3.13). God says to us, I do not ask for sacrifices of rams to expiate your guilt; I do not bid you to part with the fruit of your body for the sin of your soul; "only acknowledge your iniquity;" if you will only draw up an indictment against yourself and plead guilty, you will be sure of mercy.

All this should render this duty amiable. Throw out the poison of sin by confession, and "this day salvation has come to your house." [20]

There remains one case of conscience: are we bound to confess our sins to men? The papists greatly insist on auricular confession; one must confess his sins in the ear of the priest or he cannot be absolved. They urge, "Confess your sins one to another" (James 5.16), but this Scripture little serves their purpose. It may as well mean that the priest should confess to the people as well as the people to the priest. Auricular confession is one of the Pope's golden doctrines. Like the fish in the Gospel, it has money in its mouth: "when you have opened his mouth, you shall find a piece of money" (Mat 17.27). But though I am not for confession to men in a popish sense, yet I think in three cases there ought to be confession to men:

(1) Firstly, where a person has fallen into scandalous sin and by it has been an occasion of offense to some and of falling to others, then he ought to make a solemn and open acknowledgement of his sin so that his repentance may be as visible as his scandal (2Cor 2.6-7).

(2) Secondly, where a man has confessed his sin to God, and yet his conscience is still burdened and he can have no ease in his mind, then it is requisite that he should confess his sins to some prudent, pious friend, who may advise him and speak a word in due season (James 5. 16). It is a sinful modesty in Christians that they are not more free with their ministers and other spiritual friends in unburdening themselves and opening the sores and troubles of their souls to them. If there is a thorn sticking in the conscience, it is good to make use of those who may help to pluck it out.

(3) Thirdly, where any man has slandered another and by clipping his good name has made it less influential, he is bound to make confession. The scorpion carries its poison in its tail; the slanderer carried it in his tongue. His words pierce deep like the quills of the porcupine. The person who has murdered another in his good name or, by bearing false witness, has damaged him in his estate, and ought to confess his sin and ask forgiveness: “If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you; go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Mat 5.23-24). How can this reconciliation be effected except by confessing the injury? Till this is done, God will accept none of your services. Do not think the holiness of the altar will privilege you; your praying and hearing are in vain till you have appeased your brother’s anger by confessing your fault to him.

Chapter Four

4. THE NATURE OF TRUE REPENTANCE (2)

Ingredient 4: Shame for Sin

The fourth ingredient in repentance is shame: “that they may be ashamed of their iniquities” (Eze 43.10). Blushing is the color of virtue. When the heart has been made black with sin, grace makes the face red with blushing: “I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face” (Ezra 9.6). The repenting prodigal was so ashamed of his excess that he thought himself not worthy to be called a son any more (Luk 15.21). Repentance causes a holy bashfulness. If Christ’s blood was not at the sinner’s heart, there would not be so much blood in the sinner's face. There are nine considerations about sin which may cause shame:

(1) Every sin makes us guilty, and guilt usually breeds shame. Adam never blushed in the time of innocence. While he kept the whiteness of the lily, he did not have the blushing of the rose; but when he had deflowered his soul by sin, he was ashamed. Sin has tainted our blood. We are guilty of high treason against the Crown of heaven. This may cause a holy modesty and blushing.

(2) In every sin there is much unthankfulness, and that is a matter of shame. The one who is upbraided with ingratitude will blush. We have sinned against God when he has given us no cause: “What iniquity have your fathers found in me?” (Jer 2.5). In what has God wearied us, unless his mercies have wearied us? Oh the silver drops that have fallen on us! We have had the finest of the wheat; we have been fed with angels’ food. The golden oil of divine blessing has run down on us from the head of our heavenly Aaron. And to abuse the kindness of so good a God, how this may make us ashamed! Julius Caesar took it unkindly at the hands of Brutus,[21] on whom he bestowed so many favors, when he came to stab him: “What, you, my son Brutus?” O ungrateful, to be the worse for mercy! Aelian[22] reports that the vulture draws sickness from perfumes. How unworthy it is to contract the disease of pride and luxury from the perfume of God’s mercy; to requite evil for good; to kick against our feeder (Deu 32.15); to make an arrow of God’s mercies and shoot it at him; to wound him with his own blessing! O horrid ingratitude! Will not this dye our faces a deep scarlet? Unthankfulness is a sin so great that God himself stands amazed at it: “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me” (Isa 1.2).

(3) Sin has made us naked, and that may breed shame. Sin has stripped us of our white linen of holiness. It has made us naked and deformed in God’s eye, which may cause blushing. When Hanun had abused David’s servants and cut off their garments so that their nakedness appeared, the text says, “the men were greatly ashamed” (2Sam 10.5).

(4) Our sins have put Christ to shame, and should we not be ashamed? The Jews arrayed him in purple; they put a reed in his hand, spat in his face, and in his greatest agonies reviled him. Here was “the shame of the cross;” and that which aggravated the shame was to consider the eminency of his person, as he was the Lamb of God. Did our sins put Christ to shame, and shall they not put us to shame? Did he wear the purple, and shall not our cheeks wear crimson? Who can behold the sun as it was blushing at Christ’s passion, and hiding itself in an eclipse, and yet not blush himself?

(5) Many sins which we commit are by the special instigation of the devil, and should this not cause shame? The devil put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ (Joh 13.2). He filled Ananias’ heart to lie (Act 5.3). He often stirs up our passions (James 3.6). Now, as it is a

shame to bring forth a child illegitimately, so too it is a shame to bring forth those sins which may call the devil their father. It is said that the virgin Mary conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost (Luk 1.35); but we often conceive by the power of Satan. When the heart conceives pride, lust, and malice, it is very often by the power of the devil. May not this make us ashamed: to think that many of our sins are committed in copulation with the old serpent?

(6) Sin, like Circe's enchanting cup, turns men into beasts [23] (Psa 49.12), and is that not a matter for shame? Sinners are compared to foxes (Luk 13.32), to wolves (Mat 7.15), to asses (Job 11.12), and to swine (2Pet 2.22). A sinner is a swine with a man's head. He who was once little less than the angels in dignity has now become like the beasts. Grace in this life does not wholly obliterate this brutish temper. Agur, that good man, cried out, "Surely I am more brutish than any!" (Pro 30.1-2). But common sinners are in a way entirely made into brutes; they do not act rationally but are carried away by the violence of their lusts and passions. How this may make us ashamed who are thus degenerated below our own species? Our sins have taken away that noble, masculine spirit which we once had. The crown has fallen from our head. God's image is defaced, reason is eclipsed, and conscience is stupefied. We have more in us of the brute than of the angel.

(7) In every sin there is folly (Jer 4.22). A man will be ashamed of his folly. Is he not a fool who labors more for the bread that perishes than for the bread of life? Is he not a fool who for a lust or a trifle will lose heaven, like Tiberius who for a drink forfeited his kingdom?[24] Is he not a fool who, to safeguard his body, would injure his soul? Would someone let his arm or head be cut off to save his vest? Naviget antyciram (Horace).[25] Is he not a fool who would believe a temptation before he believes a promise? Is he not a fool who minds his recreation more than his salvation? How this may make men ashamed: to think that they inherit not land, but folly (Pro14.18)

(8) What may make us blush is that the sins we commit are far worse than the sins of the heathen. We act against more light. To us have been committed the oracles of God. The sin committed by a Christian is worse than the same sin committed by an Indian because the Christian sins against clearer conviction. This is like the dye added to the wool, or the weight put into the scale: it makes it heavier.

(9) Our sins are worse than the sins of the devils: lapsed angels never sinned against Christ's blood. Christ did not die for them. The medicine of his merit was never intended to heal them. But we have affronted and disparaged his blood by unbelief.

The devils never sinned against God's patience. As soon as they apostatized, they were damned. God never waited for the angels, but we have spent from the stock of God's patience. He has pitied our weakness, borne with our frowardness. His Spirit has been repulsed, and yet he has still importuned us and will take no denial. Our conduct has been so provoking as to have tried not only the patience of a Moses but of all the angels. We have put God to it, and made him weary of repenting (Jer15.6).

The devils never sinned against example. They were the first that sinned and they were made the first example. We have seen the angels, those morning stars, fall from their glorious orb; we have seen the old world drowned, Sodom burned, and yet have risked sin. How desperate is that thief who robs in the very place where his fellow hangs in chains. And surely, if we have out-sinned the devils, then it may well make us blush.

Use 1. Is shame an ingredient of repentance? If so, then how far from being penitents are those who have no shame? Many have sinned away shame: "the unjust knows no shame" (Zeph.

3.5). It is a great shame not to be ashamed. The Lord sets it as a brand upon the Jews: "Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed, nor could they blush" (Jer 6.15). The devil has stolen shame from men. When one of the persecutors in Queen Mary's time was upbraided for his bloodiness toward the martyrs, he replied, "I see nothing to be ashamed of." Many are no more ashamed of their sin than King Nebuchadnezzar was of being turned to eating grass.[26] When men have hearts of stone and foreheads of brass, it is a sign that the devil has taken full possession of them. There is no creature capable of shame but man. The brute beasts are capable of fear and pain, but not of shame. You cannot make a beast blush. Those who cannot blush for sin too much resemble the beasts. There are some so far from this holy blushing that they are proud of their sins. They are proud of their long hair. These are the devil's Nazarites. "Does not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man has long hair, it is a shame to him?" (1Cor 11.14). It confounds the distinction of the sexes. Others are proud of their black spots. And what if God should turn them into blue spots?

Others are so far from being ashamed of sin that they glory in their sins: "whose glory is in their shame" (Phil. 3.19). Some are ashamed of what is their glory: they are ashamed to be seen with a good book in their hand. Others glory in what is their shame: they look at sin as a piece of gallantry. The swearer thinks his speech is most graceful when it is interspersed with oaths. The drunkard considers it a glory that he can drink to excess (Isa 5.22). But when men are thrown into a fiery furnace, heated seven times hotter by the breath of the Almighty, then let them boast of sin as they see cause.

Use 2. Let us show our penitence by a modest blushing: "O my God, I blush to lift up my face" (Ezra 9.6). "My God" – there was faith; "I blush" – there was repentance. Hypocrites will confidently avouch God to be their God, but they do not know how to blush. O let us take holy shame to ourselves for sin. Be assured, the more we are ashamed of sin now, the less we will be ashamed at Christ's coming. If the sins of the godly are mentioned at the Day of Judgment, it will not be to shame them, but to magnify the riches of God's grace in pardoning them. Indeed, the wicked will be ashamed at the last day. They will sneak around and hang down their heads; but the saints will be without spot then (Eph 5.27), and without shame; therefore they are bid to lift up their heads (Luk 21.28)

Ingredient 5: Hatred of Sin

The fifth ingredient in repentance is hatred of sin. The Schoolmen[27] distinguished two objects of holy hatred: hatred of abominations, and hatred of enmity.

Firstly, there is a hatred or loathing of abominations: "You shall loathe yourselves for your iniquities" (Eze 36.31). A true penitent is a sin-loather. If a man loathes what makes him sick to his stomach, then he will much more loathe what makes his conscience sick. It is more to loathe sin than to leave it. One may leave sin out of fear, as when the plate and jewels are thrown overboard in a storm; but the nauseating and loathing of sin argues for detesting it. Christ is never loved till sin is loathed. Heaven is never longed for till sin is loathed. When a soul sees an issue of blood flowing, he cries out, "Lord, when will I be freed from this body of death? When will I put off these filthy garments of sin and have the fair crown of glory set upon my head? Let all my self-love be turned into self-loathing" (Zec 3.45). We are never more precious in God's eyes than when we are lepers in our own.

Secondly, there is a hatred of enmity. There is no better way to discover life than by motion. The eye moves, the pulse beats. So to discover repentance, there is no better sign than by a holy antipathy against sin. Hatred, said Cicero, is anger boiled up to inveteracy. Sound repentance

begins in the love of God, and it ends in the hatred of sin.

HOW MAY TRUE HATRED OF SIN BE KNOWN?

1. When a man's spirit is set against sin

The tongue not only complains bitterly against sin, but the heart abhors it; so that however curiously painted sin may appear, it is odious to us. It is like abhorring the picture of someone we mortally hate, even though it may be well-drawn. "I do not love you, Sabidius."[28] Suppose a dish is finely cooked and the sauce is good; if a man detests the meat, he still will not taste it. So even if the devil were to cook and dress sin with pleasure and profit to make it attractive, a true penitent who inwardly abhors it, will be disgusted by it, and will not meddle with it.

2. True hatred of sin is universal

True hatred of sin is universal in two ways: in respect to the faculties, and to the object.

(1) Hatred is universal in respect to the faculties; that is, there is a dislike of sin not only in the judgment, but in the will and affections. Many a person is convinced that sin is a vile thing, and in his judgment he is averse to it; yet he tastes its sweetness and he has a secret complacency in it. This is disliking sin in the judgment and embracing it in the affections. In true repentance, the hatred of sin is in all the faculties, and not just in the intellectual part; but mainly it is in the will: "what I hate, that I do" (Rom 7.15). Paul was not free from sin, yet his will was against it.

(2) Hatred is universal in respect to the object. He hates not just one sin, but all sin. Aristotle said, hatred is against the whole kind. The one who hates a serpent hates all serpents: "I hate every false way" (Psa 119.104). Hypocrites will hate some sins which mar their credit, but a true convert hates all sins, gainful sins, surface sins, even the very stirrings of corruption. Paul hated the motions of sin (Rom 7.23).

3. True hatred against sin is against sin in all forms

A holy heart detests sin for its intrinsic pollution. Sin leaves a stain upon the soul. A regenerate person abhors sin not only for the curse but for the contagion. He hates this serpent not only for its sting but for its poison. He hates sin not only for hell, but as hell.

4. True hatred is implacable

It will never be reconciled to sin any more. Anger may be reconciled, but hatred cannot. Sin is like Amalek, which is never to be taken into favor again.[29] The war between a child of God and sin is like the war between those two princes: "there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days" (1Kng 14.30).

5. Where there is a real hatred, we not only oppose sin in ourselves but in others too

The church at Ephesus could not bear with those who were evil (Rev 2.2). Paul sharply censured Peter for his dissimulation even though he was an apostle. Christ in a holy displeasure whipped the money-changers out of the temple (Joh 2.15). He would not allow the temple to be made into an exchange. Nehemiah rebuked the nobles for their usury (Neh. 5.7) and their Sabbath profanity (Neh. 13.17). A sin-hater will not endure wickedness in his family: "The one who works deceit shall not dwell within my house" (Psa 101.7). What a shame it is when magistrates can show the height of spirit in their passions, but no heroic spirit in suppressing vice. Those who have no antipathy against sin are strangers to repentance. Sin in them is like poison in a serpent, which being natural to it, affords delight.

Those who love sin instead of hating it, are far from repentance! To the godly, sin is a thorn in the eye; to the wicked, it is a crown on the head: "When you do evil, then you rejoice" (Jer 11.15). Loving sin is worse than committing it. A good man may run into a sinful action unaware; but to love sin is desperate. What is it that makes a swine but loving to tumble in the mire? What is it that makes a devil but loving what opposes God? To love sin shows that the will is in sin; and the more of the will there is in a sin, the greater the sin. Willfulness makes it a sin that is not purged by sacrifice (Heb 10.26).

O how many there are that love the forbidden fruit! They love their oaths and adulteries; they love the sin and hate the reproof. Solomon speaks of a generation of men: "madness is in their heart while they live" (Eccles. 9.3). So for men to love sin, to hug what will be their death, to sport with damnation, "madness is in their heart."

Repentance persuades us to show it by our bitter hatred of sin. There is a deadly antipathy between the scorpion and the crocodile; there should be such antipathy between the heart and sin.

Question: What is there in sin that may make a penitent hate it?

Answer: Sin is the cursed thing, the most misshapen monster. The apostle Paul uses a very emphatic word to express it: "that sin might become exceedingly sinful" (Rom 7. 13), or as it is in the Greek, "hyperbolically sinful." That sin is a hyperbolical mischief and deserves hatred will appear if we look at sin as a fourfold conceit:

(1) Look at the origin of sin, where it comes from. It fetches its pedigree from hell: "The one who commits sin is of the devil, for the devil sins from the beginning" (1Joh 3.8). Sin is the devil's proper work. God has a hand in ordering sin, it is true; but Satan has a hand in acting it out. How hateful is it to be doing the special work of the devil, indeed, what makes men devils?

(2) Look upon sin in its nature, and it will appear very hateful. See how Scripture has penciled it out: it dishonors God (Rom 2.23); despises God (1Sam 2.30); enrages God (Eze 16.43); wearies God (Isa 7.13); breaks the heart of God, just as a loving husband is broken-hearted with the unchaste conduct of his wife "I am broken with their whorish heart" (Eze 6.9). Sin, when acted to its height, crucifies Christ afresh and puts him to open shame (Heb 6.6); that is, impudent sinners pierce Christ in his saints, and if he were now upon the earth, they would crucify him again. Behold the odious nature of sin.

(3) Look upon sin in its comparison, and it appears ghastly. Compare sin with affliction and hell, and it is worse than both. It is worse than affliction, sickness, poverty, or death. There is more malignity in a drop of sin than in a sea of affliction, for sin is the cause of affliction, and the cause is more than the effect. The sword of God's justice lies quiet in the scabbard till sin draws it out. Affliction is good for us: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Psa 119.71). Affliction causes repentance (2Chr 33.12). The viper, having stricken, throws up its poison. So God's rod striking us, causes us to spit away the poison of sin. Affliction betters our grace. Gold is purest and juniper is sweetest in the fire. Affliction prevents damnation (1Cor 11.32). Therefore, Maurice the emperor[30] prayed to God to punish him in this life so that he might not be punished hereafter. Thus, affliction is in many ways for our good. But there is no good in sin. Manasseh's affliction brought him to humiliation,[31] but Judas' sin brought him to desperation.

Affliction only reaches the body, but sin goes further: it poisons the imagination, and disorders the affections. Affliction is only corrective; sin is destructive. Affliction can only take away the

life; sin takes away the soul (Luk 12.20). A man that is afflicted may have his conscience at peace. When the ark was tossed on the waves, Noah could sing in the ark. When the body is afflicted and tossed, a Christian can "make melody in his heart to the Lord" (Eph 5.19). But when a man commits sin, his conscience is terrified. Witness Spira who, upon abjuring the faith, said that he thought the damned spirits did not feel those torments which he inwardly endured.[32]

In affliction, one may have the love of God (Rev 3.19). If a man were to throw a bag of money at another man, and hurt the other man a little with it and raised the skin, that other man would not take it unkindly; he would look at it as a fruit of love. So it is when God bruises us with affliction; it is to enrich us with the golden graces and comforts of his Spirit. All is done in love. But when we commit sin, God withdraws his love. When David sinned, he felt nothing but displeasure from God: "Clouds and darkness are round about him" (Psa 97.2). David found it so. He could see no rainbow, no sunbeam, nothing but clouds and darkness aorund God's face.

It is evident that sin is worse than affliction because the greatest judgment God lays upon a man in this life is to let him sin without control. When the Lord's displeasure is most severely kindled against a person, he does not say, 'I will bring the sword and the plague on this man,' but, 'I will let him sin on.' – "So I gave them up to their own hearts' rust" (Psa 81.12). Now, if giving a man up to his sins (in God's own account) is the most dreadful evil, then sin is far worse than affliction. And if it is so, then how it should be hated by us!

Compare sin with hell, and you will see that sin is worse. Torment has its emphasis in hell, yet there is nothing as bad as sin. Hell is God's making, but sin is none of his making. Sin is the devil's creature. The torments of hell are a burden only to the sinner, but sin is a burden to God: "I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves" (Amos. 2.13). In the torments of hell, there is something that is good, namely, the execution of divine justice. There is justice to be found in hell, but sin is a piece of the highest injustice. It would rob God of his glory, rob Christ of his purchase, and rob the soul of its happiness. Judge then if sin is not the most hateful thing, even worse than affliction or hell.

(4) Look at sin in the issue and consequence of it, and it will appear hateful. Sin reaches the body. It has exposed it to a variety of miseries. We come into the world with a cry and go out with a groan. As Herodotus[33] tells us, it made the Thracians weep on their children's birthday, to consider the calamities they were to undergo in the world. Sin is the Trojan horse out of which comes a whole army of troubles. I do not need to name them because almost everyone feels them. While we suck the honey we are pricked by the briar. Sin gives a dash of poison in the wine of our comforts; it digs our grave (Rom 5.12).

Sin reaches the soul. By sin we have lost the image of God, which consisted of both our sanctity and our majesty. Adam in his pristine glory was like a herald who wears the coat of arms. Everyone reverences him because he carries the king's coat of arms. But pull this coat off, and no man regards him. Sin has done this disgrace to us. It has plucked off our coat of innocence. But that is not all. This barbed arrow of sin would strike yet deeper. It would forever separate us from the beautiful vision of God, in whose presence is fullness of joy. If sin is so hyperbolically sinful, it should swell our spleen and stir up our implacable indignation against it. Just as Ammon's hatred of Tamar was greater than his love for her (2Sam 13.15), so we should hate sin infinitely more than we ever loved it.

Ingredient 6: Turning from Sin

The sixth ingredient in repentance is a turning from sin. Reformation is left last to bring up the rear of repentance. What if one could, with Niobe, [34] weep himself into a stone if he did not weep out sin? True repentance, like aqua fortis [nitric acid], eats away the iron chain of sin. Therefore, weeping and turning are put together in Joe 2.12. After the cloud of sorrow has dripped in tears, the firmament of the soul is clearer: "Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations" (Eze 14. 6). This turning from sin is called a forsaking of sin (Isa 55.7), just as a man forsakes the company of a thief or sorcerer. It is called "putting sin far away" (Job 11.14), just as Paul put away the viper and shook it into the fire (Act 28.5). Dying to sin is the life of repentance. The very day a Christian turns from sin, he must commit himself to a perpetual fast. The eye must fast from impure glances. The ear must fast from hearing slanders. The tongue must fast from oaths. The hands must fast from bribes. The feet must fast from the path of the harlot. And the soul must fast from the love of wickedness. This turning from sin implies evident change.

There is a change worked in the heart. The flinty heart has become fleshly. Satan wanted Christ to prove his deity by turning stones into bread. Christ has worked a far greater miracle in making stones become flesh. In repentance, Christ turns a heart of stone into flesh.

There is a change worked in the life. Turning from sin is so visible that others may discern it. Therefore it is called a change from darkness to light (Eph 5.8). Paul, after he had seen the heavenly vision, was so turned that all men wondered at the change (Act 9.21). Repentance turned the jailer into a nurse and physician (Act 16.33). He took the apostles and washed their wounds and set meat before them. Say a ship is going eastward; a wind comes which turns it westward. Likewise, a man is hell-ward bound before the contrary wind of the Spirit blew, turned his course, and caused him to sail heaven-ward. Chrysostom, speaking of the Ninevites' repentance, said that if a stranger who had seen Nineveh's excess had gone into the city after they repented, he would scarcely have believed it was the same city, because it was so metamorphosed and reformed. Repentance makes such a visible change in a person, as if another soul lodged in the same body.

A few things are required so that turning from sin is rightly qualified:

1. It must be a turning from sin with the heart

The heart is the primum livens, the first thing that lives, and it must be the primum vertens, the first thing that turns. The heart is what the devil strives hardest for. He never strived for the body of Moses as he does for the heart of man. In religion, the heart is everything. If the heart is not turned from sin, it is no better than a lie: "her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to me with her whole heart, but in pretense" (Jer 3.10) or as it is in Hebrew, "in a lie." Judah made a show of reformation; she was not so grossly idolatrous as the ten tribes. Yet Judah was worse than Israel: she is called "treacherous" Judah. She pretended to be reformed, but it was not in truth. Her heart was not for God: she did not turn with the whole heart.

It is odious to make a show of turning from sin while the heart is still in league with it. I have read of one of our Saxon kings who was baptized, who in the same church had one altar for the Christian religion and another for the heathen. God will have the whole heart turned from sin. True repentance must have no reserves or inmates.

2. It must be a turning from all sin

"Let the wicked forsake his way" (Isa 55.7). A real penitent turns off the road of sin. Every sin is abandoned: just as Jehu would have all the priests of Baal slain (1Kng 10.24), so a true convert seeks the destruction of every lust; not one must escape. He knows how dangerous it is to

entertain any one sin. Someone who hides one rebel in his house is a traitor to the Crown, and someone who indulges one sin is a traitorous hypocrite.

3. It must be a turning from sin upon a spiritual ground.

A man may restrain the acts of sin, and yet not turn from sin in a right manner. Act of sin may be restrained out of fear or design; but a true penitent turns from sin out of a religious principle, namely, love to God. Even if sin did not bear such bitter fruit, even if death did not grow on this tree, a gracious soul would forsake it out of love for God. This is the most kindly turning from sin. When things are frozen and congealed, the best way to separate them is by fire. When men and their sins are congealed together, the best way to separate them is by the fire of love. Three men ask one another what made them leave sin. One says, "I think of the joys of heaven;" another said, "I think of the torments of hell;" but the third said, "I think of the love of God, and that makes me forsake it. How shall I offend the God of love?"

4. It must be such a turning from sin as turns to God.

This is in the text, "that they should repent and turn to God" (Act 26.20). Turning from sin is like pulling the arrow out of the wound; turning to God is like pouring in the balm. We read in Scripture of a repentance from dead works (Heb 6.1), and a repentance toward God (Act 20.21). Unsound hearts pretend to leave old sins, but they do not turn to God or embrace his service. It is not enough to forsake the devil's quarters; we must get under Christ's banner and wear his colors. The repenting prodigal not only left his harlots, but he arose and went to his father. It was God's complaint, "They return, but not to the most High" (Hos 7.16). In true repentance, the heart points directly to God just as the compass needle points to the North Pole.

5. True turning from sin is such a turn as has no return.

"Ephraim will say, 'What have I to do any more with idols?'" (Hos 14.8). Forsaking sin must be like forsaking one's native soil, never more to return to it. Some have seemed to be converts and seemed to have turned from sin, but they returned to their sins again. This is a returning to folly (Psa 85.8). It is a fearful sin, for it is against clear light. It may be supposed that someone who left his sin, felt his sin bitterly in the pangs of his conscience. Yet he returned to it again; he therefore sins against the illuminations of the Spirit.

Such a return to sin reproaches God: "What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me?" (Jer 2.5) Someone who returns to sin, by implication charges God with some evil. If a man puts away his wife, it implies that he knows of some fault by her. To leave God and return to sin is to tacitly asperse the Deity. God, who "hates putting away" (Mal. 2.16), hates that he himself should be put away. To return to sin gives the devil more power over a man than ever. When a man turns from sin, the devil seems to be cast out of him; but when he returns to sin, the devil enters into his house again and takes possession, and "the last state of that man is worse than the first" (Mat 12.45). When a prisoner has broken out of prison, and the jailer gets him again, he will put stronger irons on him. The one who ends a course of sinning, as it were, breaks out of the devil's prison. But if Satan takes him again by his returning to sin, Satan will hold him faster and take fuller possession of him than ever. Oh take heed of this! A true turning from sin means divorcing it, so as never to come near it any more. Whoever is thus turned from sin is a blessed person: "God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Act 3.26).

Use 1. Is turning from sin a necessary ingredient in repentance? If so, then there is little repentance to be found. People are not turned from their sins; they are still the same as they were. They were proud, and so they still are. Like the beasts in Noah's ark, they went into the

ark unclean and came out unclean. Men come to ordinances impure and go away impure. Though men have seen so many changes without, yet there is no change worked within: "the people do not turn to him who strikes" (Isa 9. 13). How can those who do not turn say they have repented? Have those who still have their leprosy on their forehead washed in the Jordan?[35] May not God say to the unreformed, as he once said to Ephraim, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone" (Hos 4.17)? Likewise, here is a man joined to his drunkenness and uncleanness: let him alone; let him go on in sin. But if there is either justice in heaven or vengeance in hell, he shall not go unpunished.

Use 2. It reproves those who are only half-turned. And who are these? Those who turn in their judgment but not in their practice. They can only acknowledge that sin, like Saturn,[36] has a bad influence on them, and they weep for sin, yet they are so bewitched by it that they have no power to leave it. Their corruptions are stronger than their convictions. These are half-turned, "almost Christians" (Act 26.20). They are like Ephraim, who was a cake baked on one side, but raw dough on the other (Hos 7.8)

They are half-turned if they turn only from gross sin but have no intrinsic work of grace. They do not prize Christ or love holiness. Those who only act civil are like Jonah: he had a plant to protect him from the heat of the sun and thought he was safe; but a worm quickly appeared and devoured the plant. So men, when they are turned from gross sin, think their civility will be a cover to defend themselves from the wrath of God. But at death, the worm of conscience arises, and strikes this plant, and then their hearts fail, and they begin to despair.

They are half-turned if they turn from many sins, but are unturned from some special sin. There is a harlot in the bosom which they will not let go of. It is as if a man were cured of several diseases, but has a cancer remaining in his breast that kills him. It reprimands those whose turning is as good as no turning, those who expel one devil only to welcome another. They turn from swearing to slandering, from profuseness to covetousness, like a sick man that turns from a tertian fever to a quartan.[37] Such turning will turn men to hell.

Use 3. Let us show ourselves penitents by turning from sin to God. There are some persons I have little hope to prevail with. Let the trumpet of the word sound ever so shrill, let threats be thundered out against them, let some flashes of hellfire be thrown in their faces, and they will still have another play at sin. These persons seem to be like the swine in the Gospel, violently carried down into the sea by the devil. They would rather be damned than turn: "they hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return" (Jer 8.5). But if there is any candor or sobriety in us, if our conscience is not in a deep sleep, then let us listen to the voice of the charmer,[38] and turn to God our supreme good.

How often does God call upon us to turn to him? He swears, "As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked: turn, turn from your evil ways" (Eze 33.11). God would rather have our repenting tears than our blood.

Turning to God is for our profit. Our repentance does not benefit God, but ourselves. If a man drinks from a fountain he benefits himself, not the fountain. If he beholds the light of the sun, he is the one refreshed by it, not the sun. If we turn from our sins to God, God is not advantaged by it. It is only we ourselves who reap the benefit. In this case, self-love should prevail with us: "If you are wise, you will be wise for yourself" (Pro 9.12).

If we turn to God, he will turn to us. He will turn his anger from us, and turn his face to us. It was David's prayer, "O turn to me, and have mercy upon me" (Psa 86.16). Our turning will make God turn: "Turn to me, says the Lord, and I will turn to you" (Zec 1.3). The one who was an

enemy will turn to be our friend. If God turns to us, then the angels are turned to us. We will have their tutelage and guardianship (Psa 91.11). If God turns to us, all things will turn to our good, both mercies and afflictions; we shall taste honey at the end of the rod.[39]

Thus we have seen the several ingredients of repentance.

Chapter Five

5. THE REASONS ENFORCING REPENTANCE

WITH A WARNING TO THE IMPENITENT

I proceed next to the reasons which enforce repentance.

1. God's sovereign command

"He commands all men everywhere to repent" (Act 17.30). Repentance is not arbitrary. It is not left to our choice whether or not to repent. It is an indispensable command. God has enacted a law in the High Court of heaven that no sinner will be saved except the repenting sinner, and God will not break his own law. Even if all the angels were to stand before God and beg for the life of an unrepenting person, God would not grant it "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, keeping mercy for thousands, will by no means clear the guilty" (Exo 34.67). Though God is more full of mercy than the sun is full of light, yet he will not forgive a sinner while he continues in his guilt: "He will by no means clear the guilty"!

2. The pure nature of God denies communion with an impenitent creature

Till the sinner repents, God and he cannot be friends: "Wash, make yourself clean" (Isa 1.16); go, steep yourselves in the brinish waters of repentance. Then, says God, I will parley with you: "Come now, and let us reason together" (Isa 1.18); but otherwise, do not come near me: "What communion has light with darkness?" (2Cor 6.14). How can the righteous God indulge someone who still goes on in his trespasses? "I will not justify the wicked" (Exo 23.7). If God were to be at peace with a sinner before he repents, God would seem to like and approve all that he has done. He would go against his own holiness. It is inconsistent with the sanctity of God's nature to pardon a sinner while he is still in the act of rebellion.

3. Sinners continuing in impenitence are out of Christ's commission

See his commission: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted" (Isa 61.1). Christ is a Prince and Savior, but not to save men in an absolute way, whether or not they repent. If ever Christ brings men to heaven, it will be through the gates of hell: "God has exalted him to be a Prince and a Savior to give repentance" (Act 5.31). A king pardons rebels if they repent and yield themselves to the mercy of their prince; but not if they persist in open defiance.

4. We have wronged God by sin

There is a great deal of equity in requiring that we repent. By sin, we have wronged God. We have eclipsed his honor. We have infringed his law. And we should reasonably make reparation. By repentance we humble and judge ourselves for sin. We stamp our seal that God is righteous if he were to destroy us. Thus we give glory to God, and we do what lies in us to do in order to repair his honor.

5. If God saves men without repentance, without discriminating, then he must save all,

…not only men, but devils, as Origen once held; and so consequently the decrees of election and reprobation must fall to the ground. Let all judge how diametrically opposed this is to sacred writ.

There are two sorts of persons who will find it harder to repent than others:

(1) Those who have sat a great while under the ministry of God's ordinances, but grow no better. The earth which drinks in the rain, and yet "bears thorns and briars, is near to being

cursed" (Heb 6.8). There is little hope of the metal which has lain long in the fire but is not melted and refined. When God has sent his ministers one after another, exhorting and persuading men to leave their sins, but they settle upon the dregs of formality, and they can sit and sleep under a sermon, it will be hard for these to ever be brought to repentance. They may fear that Christ will say to them as he once said to the fig tree, "Let no fruit grow on you forevermore" (Mat 21.19).

(2) Those who have sinned frequently against the convictions of the word, the checks of conscience, and the motions of the Spirit. Conscience has stood as the angel with a flaming sword in its hand. It has said, "Do not do this great evil;" but sinners do not regard the voice of conscience. They march on resolvedly under the devil's colors. These will not find it easy to repent: "They are of those that rebel against the light" (Job 74.13). It is one thing to sin for lack of light, and another thing to sin against light. The unpardonable sin begins here. Men begin by sinning against the light of conscience, and then proceed gradually to spite the Spirit of grace.

A Reprehension to the Impenitent

Firstly, it serves to sharply reprimand all unrepenting sinners whose hearts seem to be hewn out of rock, and are like the stony ground in the parable which lacked moisture. This disease, I fear, is epidemic: "No man repented of his wickedness" (Jer 8.6). Men's hearts are marbled into hardness: "they made their hearts like an adamant stone" (Zec 7.12). They are not at all dissolved into a penitent attitude. It is believed by some that witches never weep; I am sure that those who have no grief for sin are spiritually bewitched by Satan. We read that when Christ came to Jerusalem he "upbraided the cities because they did not repent" (Mat 11.20). And may he not likewise upbraid many now for their impenitence? Though God's heart is broken with their sins, yet their hearts are not broken. They say, as Israel did, "I have loved strangers, and I will go after them" (Jer 2. 25). The justice of God, like the angel, stands with a drawn sword in its hand, ready to strike, but sinners do not have eyes as good as those of Balaam's ass to see the sword. God pounds on men's backs, but they do not, as Ephraim did, pound on their thigh (Jer 31.19).[40] It was a sad complaint the prophet took up: "You have stricken them, but they have not grieved" (Jer 5.3). That is surely reprobate silver which hardens in the furnace. "In the time of his distress he trespassed still more against the Lord: this is that king Ahaz" (2Chr 28.22). A hard heart is a receptacle for Satan. Just as God has two places he dwells in, heaven and a humble heart, so the devil has two places he dwells in, hell and a hard heart. It is not falling into water that drowns, but lying in it. It is not falling into sin that damns, but lying in it without repentance: "having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1Tim 4.2). Hardness of heart results at last in the conscience being seared. Men have silenced their consciences, and God has seared them. And now, as a father gives up correcting a child whom he intends to disinherit, God lets them sin and does not punish "Why should you be stricken anymore?" (Isa 1.5).

Chapter Six

6. A SERIOUS EXHORTATION TO REPENTANCE

Let me in the next place persuade you to this great duty of repentance. Sorrow is good for nothing but sin. If you shed tears for outward losses, it will not advantage you. Water for the garden, if poured in the sink, will do no good. Powder for the eye, if applied to the arm, has no benefit. Sorrow is medicinal for the soul, but if you apply it to worldly things, it does no good. Oh that our tears may run in the right channel, and that our hearts may burst with sorrow for sin!

To more successfully press this exhortation, I will show you that repentance is necessary, and that it is necessary for all persons and for all sins.

1. Repentance is necessary

Repentance is necessary: "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luk 13.5). There is no rowing to paradise except upon the stream of repenting tears. Repentance is required as a qualification. It is not so much to endear us to Christ as to endear Christ to us. Till sin is bitter, Christ will not be sweet.

2. Repentance is necessary for all persons

God commands it of all men: "now God commands all men everywhere to repent" (Act 17.30).

(1) It is necessary for great ones: "Say to the king and to the queen, Humble yourselves" (Jer 13.18). The king of Nineveh and his nobles exchanged their robes for sackcloth (Jon. 3.6). Great men's sins do more harm than the sins of others. The sins of leaders are leading sins; therefore of all others they need to repent. If those who hold the scepter do not repent, God has appointed a day to judge them and a fire in which to burn them (Isa 30.33).

(2) Repentance is necessary for the most wicked sinners in the nation. England needs to put itself in mourning and be humbled by solemn repentance. Anglica gens est optima flens.[41] What horrible impieties are chargeable upon the nation! We see persons daily enlisting themselves under Satan. Not only the banks of religion but those of civility are broken down. Men seem to contend, as the Jews of old did, to see who would be the most wicked: "In their filthiness is lewdness" (Eze 24.13). If oaths and drunkenness, if perjury and luxury, make a people guilty, then it is to be feared England is in God's black book. Men have cancelled their vow in baptism and made a private contract with the devil! Instead of crying for mercy to save them, they cry, "God damn them!" Never was there such riding post-haste to hell, as if men despaired of getting there in time. Has it not been known that some have died with the guilt of fornication and blood on them? Has it not been told that others have boasted how many they have debauched and made themselves drunk? Thus "they declare their sin like Sodom" (Isa 3.9). Indeed, men's sins have grown daring, as if they would hang out their flag of defiance and give heaven a broadside, like the Thracians who, when it thunders, gather together in a body and shoot their arrows against heaven. The sinners in Britain even send God a challenge: "They strengthen themselves against the Almighty; they run headlong at him into his thickly studded shield" (Job 15.25-26). The studs in the shield are for offense in war. God's precepts and threats are, as it were, the thick studs of his shield by which he would deter men from wickedness. These sinners pay no attention to them, however. They are desperately in sin, and they run furiously against the studs. Oh to what a height their sin has boiled up! Men consider it a shame not to be impudent. May it not be said of us, as Josephus speaks of the Jews. Such was the excessive wickedness of those times that if the Romans had not come and sacked their city, then Jerusalem would have been swallowed up with some earthquake,

or drowned with a flood, or fired on from heaven. And is it not high time then for this nation to enter into a course of medicine, and to take this pill of repentance, which has so many bad diseases spreading in her body politic? England is an island encompassed by two oceans: an ocean of water, and an ocean of wickedness. O that it might be encompassed with a third ocean: that of repenting tears!

If the book of the law should chance to fall on the ground, the Jews have a custom to quickly proclaim a fast. England has let both law and gospel fall to the ground, therefore needs to fast and mourn before the Lord. The ephah of wickedness seems to be full.[42] There is good reason for tears to empty apace when sin fills it so fast! Why then are all faces not pale? Why are the wells of repentance stopped up? Do not the sinners of the land know that they should repent? Have they no warning? Have not God's faithful messengers lifted up their voice as a trumpet and cried to them to repent? But many of these tools in the ministry have been spent and worn out on rocky hearts. Has God not lighted extraordinary comets in the heavens as so many preachers to call men to repentance? But still they are settled on their dregs (Zeph. 1.12)? Do we think that God will always put up with our affronts? Will he endure to have his name and glory trampled upon? The Lord has usually been more swift in the process of his justice against the sins of a professing people. God may reprieve this land awhile by prerogative, but if he ever saves it without repentance, then he must depart from his ordinary road.

I say therefore with Mr. Bradford, "Repent, O England!"[43] You have made yourself a leper with sin, and you must go and wash in the spiritual Jordan. You have kindled God's anger against you. Throw away your weapons, and bring your holy engines and waterworks, so that God may be appeased in the blood of Christ. Let your tears run; let God's roll of curses fly (Zec 5.2). Either men must turn, or God will overturn. Either the fallow ground of their hearts must be broken up, or the land must be broken down. If no words will prevail with sinners, it is because God intends to slay them (1Sam 2.25). Among the Romans, someone who was condemned for a capital offense was forbidden the use of water. Those who have so incensed the God of heaven by their prodigious sins, that he denies them the water of repentance, may also look at themselves as condemned persons.

(3) Repentance is necessary for the cheating crew: "their deceit is falsehood" (Psa 119.118); "they are wise in evil" (Jer 4.22), making use of their inventions only to circumvent the law. Instead of living by their faith, they live by their shifts. These are the ones who make themselves poor so that by this artifice they may grow rich. I would not be misunderstood. I do not mean those who, under the providence of God, are poor, those whose estates have failed but not their honesty. Rather I speak of those who feign being broke so they may cheat their creditors. There are some who get more by "going broke" than others can by trading. These are like beggars who discolor and blister their arms to encourage charity. As these beggars live by their sores, so these cheats live by their false poverty. When the frost breaks, the streets are more full of water. Likewise, many tradesmen when they go broke, have even more money. They make out as if they had nothing, but out of this nothing great estates are created. Remember, the kingdom of heaven is taken by force,[44] not by fraud. Let men know that after this golden sop, the devil enters. They squeeze a curse into their estates. They must repent quickly. Though the bread of falsehood is sweet (Pro 20.17), many will vomit up their sweet morsels in hell.

(4) Repentance is necessary for well-behaved persons. These have no visible spots on them. They are free from gross sin, and one would think they had nothing to do with the business of repentance. They are so good that they scorn a psalm of mercy. Indeed these are often in the worst condition: these are the ones who need no repentance (Luk 15.7). Their civility undoes

them. They make a Christ of it, and so on this shelf they suffer shipwreck.[45] Morality shoots short of heaven. It is only nature refined. A moral man is but old Adam dressed in fine clothes. The king's image counterfeited and stamped on brass will not become currency. The civil person seems to have the image of God, but he is only brass metal which will never pass for currency. Civility is insufficient for salvation. Though the life may be moralized, the lust may be unmortified. The heart may be full of pride and atheism. Under the fair leaves of a tree there may be a worm. I am not saying, repent all you who are are civil, but that you are nothing more than civil. Satan entered into the house that had just been swept and put in order (Luk 11.25-26). This is the emblem of a moral man who has been swept clean by civility and set in order with common gifts; but he is not washed by true repentance. The unclean spirit enters into such a person. If civility were sufficient for salvation, Christ need not have died. The civilian has an attractive lamp, but it lacks the oil of grace.

(5) Repentance is necessary for hypocrites. I mean those who allow themselves the sin. Hypocrisy is the counterfeiting of sanctity. The hypocrite or stage-player has gone a step beyond the moralist and dressed himself in the garb of religion. He pretends with a form of godliness but he denies the power of it (2Tim 3.5). The hypocrite is a saint in jest. He makes a magnificent show, like an ape clothed in ermine or purple. The hypocrite is like a house with a beautiful facade, but every room is dark. He is a rotten post that has been beautifully gilded. Under his mask of profession he hides his plague-sores. The hypocrite is against painting faces, but he paints holiness. He is seemingly good so that he may be really bad. In Samuel's cloak,[46] he plays the devil. Therefore the same word in the original signifies to use hypocrisy and to be profane. The hypocrite seems to have his eyes nailed to heaven, but his heart is full of impure lusts. He lives in secret sin against his conscience. He can be like the company he keeps, and acts both the dove and the vulture. He hears the word, but only hears. He is for temple-devotion where others may look at him and admire him, but he neglects family and private prayer. Indeed, if prayer does not make a man leave sin, then sin will make him leave prayer. The hypocrite feigns humility but it is so that he may rise in the world. He is a pretender to faith, but he makes use of it rather for a cloak than a shield. He carries his Bible under his arm, but not in his heart. His whole religion is a demure lie (Hos 11.12).

But is there such a generation of men to be found? The Lord forgive them their holiness! Hypocrites are "in the gall of bitterness" (Act 8.23). O how they need to humble themselves in the dust! They are far gone with the rot, and if anything can cure them, it must be feeding on the salt marshes of repentance.

Let me speak my mind freely. None will find it more difficult to repent than hypocrites. They have so juggled in religion that their treacherous hearts do not know how to repent. Hypocrisy is harder to cure than madness. The hypocrite's abscess in his heart seldom bursts. If it is not too late, seek God for mercy.

Those who are guilty of prevailing hypocrisy, let them fear and tremble. Their condition is sinful and sad. It is sinful because they do not embrace religion out of choice but design; they do not love it; they only paint it. It is sad on a double account. Firstly, because this art of deceit cannot hold for long; the one who hangs out a sign, but does not have the commodity of grace in his heart, must go broke in the end. Secondly, it is sad because God's anger will fall heavier on hypocrites. They dishonor God more and take away the gospel's good name. Therefore the Lord reserves the most deadly arrows in his quiver to shoot at them. If heathens are damned, hypocrites will be double-damned. Hell is called the place of hypocrites (Mat 24.51), as if it was mainly prepared for them, and was to be settled for them in fee-simple.[47]

(6) Repentance is necessary for God's own people, who have a real work of grace and are Israelites indeed. They must offer up a daily sacrifice of tears. The Antinomians[48] hold that when anyone becomes a believer, a writ of ease is given to them; there remains nothing for them now to do but to rejoice. Yes, they have something else to do, and that is to repent. Repentance is a continuous act. Godly sorrow will not fully end till death. Jerome, writing in an epistle to Laeta, tells her that her life must be a life of repentance. Repentance is called "crucifying the flesh" (Gal 5.24), which is not done suddenly, but over time; it will be going on all our life.

And are there not many reasons why God's own people should go into the weeping bath? "Are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord?" (2Chr 28.10). Do you not have sins of daily incursion? Though you are diamonds, do you have no flaws? Do we not read of the "spot of God's children" (Deu 32.5). Search into your hearts with the candle of the word and see if you can find nothing needing repentance there.

(a) Repent of your rash censuring. Instead of praying for others, you are ready to pass a verdict on them. It is true that the saints shall judge the world (1Cor 6.2), but bide your time! Remember the apostle's caution in 1Cor 4.5: "judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes."

(b) Repent of your vain thoughts. These swarm in your minds as the flies did in Pharaoh's court (Exo 8.24). What bewilderment there is in the imagination! If Satan does not possess your bodies, he possesses your imaginations. "How long will your vain thoughts lodge within you?" (Jer 4.14). A man may think himself into hell. O you saints, be humbled for this lightness in your head.

(c) Repent of your vain fashions. It is strange that the garments which God gave to cover shame would reveal pride. The godly are bid not to be conformed to this world (Rom 12.2). People of the world are garish and light in their dresses. It is in fashion nowadays to go to hell. But whatever others do, do not let Judah offend (Hos 4.15). The apostle Paul has set down what upper garment Christians must wear: "modest apparel" (1Tim 2.9); and what undergarment they must wear: "be clothed with humility" (1Pet 5.5).

(d) Repent of your decays in grace: "you have left your first love" (Rev 2.4). Christians, how often it is low tide in your souls! How often does your cold fit come upon you! Where are those flames of affection, those sweet meltings of spirit that you once had? I fear they are melted away. Oh repent for leaving your first love!

(e) Repent of not improving your talents. Health is a talent; estate is a talent; wit and parts are talents; and God has entrusted these to you to improve with for his glory. He has sent you into the world as a merchant sends his agent beyond the seas to trade for his master's advantage; but you have not done the good you might. Can you say, "Lord, your pound has gained five pounds" (Luk 19.18)? Or do you mourn at the burial of your talents? Let it grieve you that so much of your life has not been time lived but time lost; that you have filled up your golden hours more with froth than with spirits.

(f) Repent of forgetting sacred vows. A vow binds one's soul to God (Num 30.2). Christians, since you have been bound to God, have you not forfeited your other indentures? Have you served for common uses after you have been the Lord's by solemn dedication? By breach of vows you have breached your peace. Surely this calls for a fresh basin of tears.

(g) Repent of your unresponsiveness to the blessings you received. You have lived all your

life on free quarter. You have spent your stock of free graces. You have been miraculously blessed with mercy. But where are your returns of love to God? The Athenians sued ungrateful persons at law. Christians, may not God sue you at law for your unthankfulness? "I will recover my wool and my flax" (Hos 2.9); I will recover them by law.

(h) Repent of your worldliness. By your profession you seem to resemble the birds of paradise that soar aloft and live on the dew of heaven. Yet as serpents you lick the dust. Baruch, a good man, was taxed with this: "do you seek great things for yourself?" (Jer 45.5).

(i) Repent of your divisions. These are a blot in your coat of armor. They make others stand aloof from religion. Separating from the wicked imitates Christ who was "separate from sinners" (Heb 7.26). But for the godly to divide themselves and look askew at one another, if we had as many eyes as there are stars, they would be too few to weep for this! Divisions eclipse the church's beauty and weaken her strength. God's Spirit brought cloven tongues of fire among the saints (Act 2.3), but the devil has brought cloven hearts. Surely this deserves a shower of tears:

Quis talia fando Temperet a lachrymis?[49]

(j) Repent for the iniquity of your holy things. How often have the services of God's worship been frozen with formality and soured with pride? There have been more of the peacock's plumes than the mourning of the dove. It is sad that duties of religion should be made a stage for vainglory to act upon. O Christians, there is such a thick crust on your duties that it may be feared there is little meat left in them for God to feed upon.[50]

Behold: repenting work is cut out for the best. And what may make the tide of grief swell higher is to think that the sins of God's people provoke God more than the sins of others (Deu 32.19). The sins of the wicked pierce Christ's side. The sins of the godly go to his heart. Peter's sin, being acted out against so much love, was most unkind, which made his cheeks furrowed with tears: "When he thought about it, he wept" (Mar 14.72).

3. Repentance is necessary for all sins

Let us be deeply humbled and mourn before the Lord for original sin. We have lost that pure quintessential frame of soul that we once had. Our nature is vitiated with corruption. Original sin has diffused itself as a poison into the whole man, like the Jerusalem artichoke which, wherever it is planted, soon overruns the ground. There are no worse natures in hell than we have. The hearts of the best are like Peter's sheet, on which there were a number of unclean creeping things (Act 10.12). This primitive corruption is to be bitterly bewailed because we are never free from it. It is like an underground spring which, though it is not seen, still runs. We may as well stop the beating of the pulse as to stop the motions to sin.

This inbred depravity retards and hinders us in what is spiritual: "the good that I would do, I do not do" (Rom 7.19). Original sin may be compared to the fish that Pliny speaks of, a sea-lamprey,[51] which cleaves to the keel of the ship and hinders it when it is under sail. Sin hangs weights upon us so that we move slowly to heaven. O this adherence of sin! Paul shook the viper which was on his hand into the fire (Act 28.5), but we cannot shake off original corruption in this life. Sin does not come as a lodger for a night, but as an indweller: "sin that dwells in me" (Rom 7.17). It stays with us like the hectic fever of tuberculosis; though the sufferer changes the air, he still carries his disease with him. Original sin is inexhaustible. This ocean cannot be emptied. Though the stock of sin is spent, it is not at all diminished. The more we sin, the fuller we are of sin. Original corruption is like the widow's oil which increased by pouring it out.

Another wedge to break our hearts is that original sin mixes with the habits of grace. This is why our actions towards heaven are so dull and languid. Why does faith not act any stronger unless it is clogged with a sense of sin? Why does love toward God burn no purer unless it is hindered with lust? Original sin incorporates with our graces. As bad lungs cause asthma or shortness of breath, so the infection o f original sin in our heart causes our graces to breathe very faintly. Thus we see what it is in original sin that may draw our tears.

In particular, let us lament the corruption of our will and our affections. Let us mourn for the corruption of our will. The will that is not following the dictate of right reason is biased toward evil. The will distastes God, not as he is good, but as he is holy. It contumaciously affronts him: "we will do whatever goes out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven" (Jer 44.17). The greatest wound has fallen upon our will.

Let us grieve for the diversion of our affections. They are taken off their proper object. The affections, like arrows, shoot beside the mark. At the beginning, our affections were wings to fly to God; now they are weights to pull us away from him.

Let us grieve for the inclination of our affections. Our love is set on sin, and our joy is set on the creature. Our affections, like the lapwing,[52] feed on dung. How justly may the disease of our affections bear a part in the scene of our grief? Of ourselves, we are falling into hell, and our affections would thrust us there.

Let us lay to heart our actual sins. Of these I may say, "Who can understand his errors?" (Psa 19.12). They are like atoms in the sun, like the sparks of a furnace. We have sinned in our eyes; they have been casements[53] to let in vanity. We have sinned in our tongues; they have been fired with passion. What action proceeds from us in which we do not betray some sin? To reckon these up would be like numbering the drops in the ocean. Let actual sins be solemnly repented of before the Lord.

Chapter Seven

7. POWERFUL MOTIVES TO REPENTANCE

To make the exhortation to repentance more lively, I will lay down some powerful motives to excite us to repentance.

1. Sorrow and a melting heart will fit us for every holy duty

A piece of lead, while it is in the lump, can be put to no use. But melt it, and you may then pour it into any mold, and it is made useful. So a heart that is hardened into a lump of sin is good for nothing; but when it is dissolved by repentance, it is useful. A melting heart is fit to pray. When Paul's heart was humbled and melted, then "behold, he prays" (Act 9.11). It is fit to hear the word;now the word works kindly. When Josiah's heart was tender, he humbled himself and rent his clothes at hearing the words of the law (2Chr 34.19). His heart, like melting wax, was ready to take any seal of the word. A melting heart is fit to obey. When the heart is like metal in the furnace, it is facile and malleable to anything: "Lord, what will you have me do?" (Act 9.6). A repenting soul subscribes to God's will and answers his call, just as an echo answers the voice.

2. Repentance is highly acceptable

When a spiritual river runs to water this garden, then our hearts are a Garden of Eden, delightful to God. I have read that doves delight to be about the waters. And surely God's Spirit, who descended in the likeness of a dove, takes great delight in the waters of repentance.

The Lord does not regard any heart as sound except the broken heart: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit" (Psa 51.17). Mary stood at Jesus' feet weeping (Luk 7.38). She brought two things to Christ, said Augustine, unguentum and lachrymas (ointment and tears). Her tears were better than her ointment. Tears are powerful orators for mercy. They are silent, yet they have a voice: "the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping" (Psa 6.8).

3. Repentance commends all our services to God

What is seasoned with the bitter herbs of godly sorrow is God's savory meat. When we are pricked at the heart, hearing the word is good, (Act 2.37). Prayer is delightful to God when it ascends from the altar of a broken heart. The publican struck upon his breast saying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." This prayer pierced heaven: "he went away justified rather than the other" (Luk 18.14). No prayer touches God's ear except what comes from a heart touched with the sense of sin.

4. Without repentance nothing will avail us

Some bless themselves that they have a stock of knowledge; but what is knowledge good for without repentance? It is better to mortify one sin than to understand all mysteries. Impure speculators only resemble Satan transformed into an angel of light. Learning and a bad heart is like a fair face with cancer in the breast. Knowledge without repentance will only be a torch to light men's way to hell.

5. Repenting tears are delicious

They may be compared to myrrh which, though bitter, has a sweet smell and refreshes the spirits. So repentance, though it is bitter in itself, yet it is sweet in its effects. It brings inward peace. The soul is never more enlarged and inwardly delighted than when it can kindly melt. Alexander, upon the safe return of his admiral Nearchus from a long voyage, wept for joy.[54] How often the saints fall, weeping for joy! The Hebrew word for "repent" signifies "to take comfort." There is none so joyful as the penitent! Tears, as the philosopher notes, have four qualities:

they are moist, salty, hot, and bitter. This is true of repenting tears. They are hot, to warm a frozen conscience; moist, to soften a hard heart; salty, to season a soul putrefying in sin; bitter, to wean us from the love of the world. And I will add a fifth. They are sweet, in that they make the heart inwardly rejoice: "and sorrow shall be turned into joy" (Job 41.22). Let a man, said Augustine, grieve for his sin and rejoice for his grief. Tears are the best pastry. David, who was the great weeper in Israel, was the sweet singer of Israel. The sorrows of the penitent are like the sorrows of a travailing woman: "A woman when she is in travail has sorrow, but as soon as the child is delivered, she remembers no more the anguish, because of her joy that a man is born into the world" (Joh 16.21). So the sorrows of humbled sinners bring forth grace, and what joy there is when this man-child is born!

6. Great sins repented of shall find mercy

Mary Magdalene, a great sinner, obtained pardon when she washed Christ's feet with her tears. Some of the Jews who had a hand in crucifying Christ, upon their repentance, the very blood that they shed became a sovereign balm to heal them: "though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isa 1.18). Scarlet in Greek is called "dibasson," because it is "twice dipped," and the art of man cannot wash out the dye again. But though our sins are scarlet, God's mercy can wash them away. This may comfort those who are discouraged by the heinousness of their sin, as if there were no hope for them. Yes, upon their serious turning to God, their sins will be expunged and done away with.

"Oh, but my sins are sinful beyond measure!" Do not make them greater by not repenting. Repentance unravels sin and makes it as if it had never been.

"Oh, but I have relapsed into sin after pardon, and surely there is no mercy for me!" I know the Novatians held that after a lapse there was no renewing by repentance; but doubtless that was an error. The children of God have relapsed into the same sin: Abraham twice equivocated; Lot committed incest twice; Asa, a good king, sinned twice by creature-confidence, and Peter sinned twice by carnal fear (Mat 26.70; Gal 2.12). But for the comfort of those who have relapsed into sin more than once, if they solemnly repent, a white flag of mercy will be held out to them. Christ commands us to forgive our trespassing brother seventy times seven in one day, in case he repents (Mat 18.22). If the Lord bids us do it, will he not be much more ready to forgive us upon our repentance? What is our forgiving mercy compared to his? I do not say this to encourage any impenitent sinner, but to comfort a despondent sinner who thinks repentance is in vain, and that he is excluded from mercy.

7. Repentance is the inlet to spiritual blessings

It helps to enrich us with grace. It causes the desert to blossom as the rose. It makes the soul like the Egyptian fields after the Nile overflows: flourishing and fruitful. Never do the flowers of grace grow more than after a shower of repentant tears. Repentance causes knowledge: "When their heart turns to the Lord, the veil will be taken away" (2Cor 3.16). The veil of ignorance which was drawn over the Jews' eyes will by be taken away repentance. Repentance inflames love. Weeping Mary Magdalene loved much (Luk 7.47). God preserves these springs of sorrow in the soul to water the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5.22).

8. Repentance ushers in temporal blessings

The prophet Joel, persuading the people to repentance, brings in the promise of secular good things: "rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn to the Lord ... the Lord will answer and say to his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil" (Joe 2.13, 19). When we put water into the pump, it fetches up only water, but when we put the water of tears into God's bottle, this fetches up wine: "I will send you wine, and oil." Sin blasts the fruits of the earth: "You

have sown much, and bring in little" (Hag 1.6). But repentance makes the pomegranate bud and the vine flourish with full clusters. Fill God's bottle and he will fill your basket. "If you return to the Almighty, you will lay up gold like dust" (Job 22.23-24). Repenting is returning to God, and this brings a golden harvest.

9. Repentance staves off judgments from a land

When God is going to destroy a nation, the penitent sinner stays his hand, as the angel did Abraham's (Gen 22.12). The Ninevites' repentance caused God to repent: "God saw that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the disaster he said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it" (Jon. 3.10). An outward repentance has adjourned and kept off wrath. Ahab sold himself to work wickedness; yet upon fasting and rending his garments, God said to Elijah, "I will not bring the evil in his days" (1Kng 21.29). If rending the clothes kept off judgment from the nation, what will rending the heart do?

10. Repentance makes joy in heaven

The angels, as it were, keep a holy day: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents" (Luk 15.10). As praise is the music of heaven, so repentance is the joy of heaven. When men neglect the offer of salvation and freeze in sin, this delights the devils. But when a soul is brought home to Christ by repentance, this makes joy among the angels.

11. Consider how dear our sins cost Christ

Considering how dearly our sins cost Christ may cause tears to distil from our eyes. Christ is called the Rock (1Cor 10.4). When his hands were pierced with nails, and the spear thrust in his side, then this Rock was struck, and water and blood came out. And all this Christ endured for us: "the Messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself" (Dan. 9.26). We tasted the apple, and he tasted the vinegar and gall. We sinned in every faculty, and he bled in every vein: Cernis ut in toto corpore sculptus amor.[55]

Can we look upon a suffering Savior with dry eyes? Will we not be sorry for those sins which made Christ a man of sorrow? Will not our enormities, which drew blood from Christ, draw tears from us? Will we play any more with sin and so scrape Christ's wounds? Oh that by repentance we could crucify our sins afresh! The Jews said to Pilate, "If you let this man go, you are not Caesar's friend" (Joh 19.12). If we let our sins go and do not crucify them, we are not Christ's friends.

12. This is the purpose of all afflictions which God sends,

Whether it is sickness in our bodies or losses in our estates, God would awaken us from our sins and make the waters of repentance flow. Why did God lead Israel on that march in the wilderness among fiery serpents except to humble them (Deu8.2)? Why did he bring Manasseh so low, changing his crown of gold into fetters of iron except that he might learn repentance? "He humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God" (2Chr 33.12-13). One of the best ways to cure a man of his lethargy, is to push him into a fever. Likewise, when a person is stupefied and his conscience has grown lethargic, God puts him under extremes. He brings one burning calamity or another to cure the person of this disease – to startle him out of his security and make him return to God by repentance.

13. The days of our mourning will soon be ended

After a few showers that fall from our eyes, we will have perpetual sunshine. Christ will provide a handkerchief to wipe off his people's tears: "God will wipe away all tears" (Rev7.17). Christians, you will shortly put on your garments of praise. You will exchange your sackcloth for

white robes. Instead of sighs you will have triumphs; instead of groans, you will have anthems; instead of the water of tears, you will have the water of life. The mourning of the dove will be past, and the time of the singing of birds will come. Volitant super aethera cantus.[56] This brings me to the next point.

14. The happy and glorious reward that follows upon repentance

"Being freed from sin, you have your fruit unto holiness, and the end, everlasting life" (Rom 6.22). The leaves and root of the fig tree are bitter, but the fruit is sweet. Repentance to the fleshy part seems bitter, but behold sweet fruit: everlasting life. The Turks fancy that after this life there is an Elysium or paradise of pleasure, where delicacies will be served, and they will have gold in abundance, silken and purple apparel, and angels will bring them red wine in silver cups, and golden plates. Here is an epicure's heaven. But in the true paradise of God there are astonishing delights and rare foods served, which "eye has not seen, nor have entered into the heart of man" (1Cor 2.9). God will lead his penitents from the house of mourning to the banquet house. There will be no sight there but of glory, no noise but of music, no sickness unless of love. There shall be holiness unspotted and joy unspeakable. Then the saints shall forget their solitary hours and be sweetly solacing themselves in God and bathing in the rivers of divine pleasure.

O Christian, what are your duties compared with the recompense of reward? What an infinite disproportion there is between repentance enjoined and glory prepared. There was a feast day at Rome, when they used to crown their fountains. God will crown those heads which have been fountains of tears. Who would not be willing to be awhile in the house of mourning, and to possess the glory that put Peter and John into an ecstasy to see it even darkly, shadowed and portrayed in the transfiguration (Mat17)? This reward which free grace gives is so transcendently great that if we could have but a glimpse of glory revealed to us here, we would need patience to be content to live any longer. O blessed repentance, that has such a light beside the dark, and has so much sugar at the bottom of the bitter cup!

15. The next motive to repentance is to consider the evil of impenitence

A hard heart is the worst heart. It is called a heart of stone (Eze 36.26). If it were iron, it might be mollified in the furnace; but a stone put in the fire will not melt; it will likely fly in your face. Impenitence is a sin that grieves Christ: "being grieved for the hardness of their hearts" (Mar 3.5). It is not so much the disease that offends the physician as the contempt of his medicine. It is not so much the sins we have committed that so provoke and grieve Christ, as that we refuse the medicine of repentance which he prescribes. This aggravated Jezebel's sin: "I gave her space to repent, and she did not repent" (Rev 2.21). A hard heart receives no impression. It is untuned for every duty. It was a sad speech Stephen Gardiner [57] uttered on his deathbed: "I have denied my Master with Peter, but I cannot repent with Peter." Oh the plague of an obdurate heart! Pharaoh's heart turned into stone was worse than his waters turned into blood. David had his choice of three judgments: plague, sword, and famine; but he would have chosen them all rather than a hard heart. An impenitent sinner is neither allured by entreaties nor frightened by menaces. Those who will not weep with Peter will weep like Judas. A hard heart is the anvil on which the hammer of God's justice will strike to all eternity.

16. The last motive to repentance is that the Day of Judgment is coming

This is the apostle's own argument: "God commands all men everywhere to repent; because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world" (Act 17.3031). The Day of Judgment has what may make a stony heart bleed. Will a man go on thieving when the courts are near? Will the sinner go on sinning when the Day of Judgment is so near? You can no more conceal your

sin than you can defend it. And what will you do when all your sins are written in God's book and engraved on your forehead? O direful day, when Jesus Christ, clothed in his judge's robe, says to the sinner, "Stand forward; answer to the indictment brought against you. What can you say for all your oaths, adulteries, and your desperate impenitence?" O how amazed and stricken with consternation the sinner will be! And after his conviction he must hear the sad sentence, "Depart from me!" Then, the one who would not repent of his sins will repent of his folly. If such a time is coming, in which God judges men for their impieties, then what an incentive this should be to repentance! For the penitent soul at the last day will lift up his head with comfort, and have his discharge papers, signed in the Judge's own hand.

Chapter Eight

8. EXHORTATIONS TO SPEEDY REPENTANCE

The second branch of the exhortation is to press persons to speedy repentance: “now God commands all men everywhere to repent” (Act 17.30). The Lord would not have any of the late autumn fruits offered to him. God loves early penitents that consecrate the spring and flower of their age to him. Early tears, like pearls bred from the morning dew, are more lustrous and beautiful. O do not reserve the dregs of your age for God, lest he reserve the dregs of his cup for you! Be as speedy in your repentance as you would have God speedy in his mercies: “the king’s business required haste” (1Sam 21.8). Therefore repentance requires haste.

It is natural for us to procrastinate and put off repentance. We say, as Haggai did, “The time has not come” (Hag 1.2). No man is so bad that he does not purpose to amend; but he adjourns and delays so long, until at last all his purposes prove abortive. Many are now in hell that purposed to repent. Satan does what he can to keep men from repentance. When he sees that they begin to take up serious thoughts of reformation, he bids them wait a little longer. If this traitor, sin, must die (says Satan), let it not die yet. So the devil gets a reprieve for sin; it shall not die this session. At last men put it off so long that death seizes them, and their work is not done. Let me therefore lay down some cogent arguments to persuade you to speedy repentance:

1. Now is the season of repentance, and everything is best done in its season

“Now is the accepted time” (2Cor 6.2); now God has a mind to show mercy to the penitent. He is on the giving hand. Kng set apart days for healing. Now is the healing day for our souls. Now God hangs out the white flag and is willing to parley with sinners. A prince at his coronation, as an act of royalty, gives money, proclaims pardons, and fills the conduits with wine. Now God promises pardons to penitent sinners; now the conduit of the gospel flows with wine. Now is the accepted time. Therefore come in now and make your peace with God. Break off your iniquities now by repentance. It is wisdom to take the opportunity. The husbandman takes the seasonal opportunity to sow his seed. Now is the seedtime for our souls.

2. The sooner you repent the fewer sins you will have to answer for

At the deathbed of an old sinner, where conscience begins to be awakened, you will hear him crying out, “Here all my old sins have come around me, haunting my deathbed like so many evil spirits, and I have no discharge from them. Here is Satan, who was once my tempter; now he has become an accuser, and I have no advocate. I am now going to be dragged before God’s judgment-seat where I must receive my final doom!” O how dismal is the case of this man. He is in hell before his time! But those o fyou who repent early of your sinful courses, this is your privilege: you will have less to answer for. Indeed, let me tell you that you will have nothing to answer for. Christ will answer for you. Your judge will be your advocate (1Joh 2.1). Father, Christ will say, here is one that has been a great sinner, yet a broken-hearted sinner; if he owes anything to your justice, set it on my score.

3. The sooner we repent, the more glory we may bring to God

It is the purpose of our living, to be useful in our generation. Better to lose our lives than the purpose of our living. Late converts who have for many years taken pay on the devil’s side, are not in a capacity to do much work in the vineyard. The thief on the cross could not serve God as St. Paul did. But when we do turn from sin early, then we give God the firstfruits of our lives. We spend and are spent for Christ. The more work we do for God, the more willing we will be to die, and the sweeter death will be. Someone who has worked hard at day-labor is willing to rest at night. Those who have been honoring God all their lives, how sweetly they will sleep in the

grave! The more work we do for God, the greater our reward will be. Christ not only commended the one whose pound had gained ten pounds, but he promoted him: "Have authority over ten cities" (Luk 19.17). By late repentance, even though we do not lose our crown, we make it lighter.

4. Putting off repentance any longer has dangerous consequences

Mora trahit periculum.[58] Delay is dangerous if we consider what sin is: sin is a poison. It is dangerous to let poison lie long in the body. Sin is a bruise. If a bruise is not soon cured, it gangrenes and kills. If sin is not soon cured by repentance, it festers the conscience and it damns the soul. Why should anyone love to dwell in the tents of wickedness? They are under the power of Satan (Act 26.18), and it is dangerous to stay long in the enemy's quarters.

It is dangerous to postpone repentance, because the longer any go on in sin, the harder they will find the work of repentance. Delay strengthens sin and hardens the heart and gives the devil fuller possession. A plant at first may be easily plucked up, but when it has spread its roots deep in the earth, a whole team cannot remove it. It is hard to remove sin once it comes to be rooted. The longer the ice freezes, the harder it is to break. The longer a man freezes in security, the harder it will be to break his heart. The longer anyone travails with iniquity, the sharper pangs he must expect in the new birth. When sin has gotten a haunt, it is not easily shaken off. Sin comes to a sinner as the elder brother came to his father: "Look, these many years I have serve you, and I never transgressed your commandment" (Luk 15.29), and will you throw me out now? What, in my old age, after you have had so much pleasure by me? See how sin pleads it is accustomed, and that it is a leopard's spot (Jer 13.23).

It is dangerous to prorogue and delay repentance because there are three days that may soon expire:

(1) The day of the gospel may expire. This is a sunshiny day. It is sweet but swift. Jerusalem had a day but lost it: "but now they are hidden from your eyes" (Luk 19.42). The Asian churches had a day, but at last the golden lampstand was removed.[59] It would be a sad time in England to see the glory departed. With what hearts could we follow the gospel to the grave? To lose the gospel would be far worse than to have our city charter taken from us. "Gray hairs are here and there" (Hos 7.9).1 will not say the sun of the gospel is set in England, but I am sure it is under a cloud. That was a sad speech, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you" (Mat 21.43). Therefore it is dangerous to delay repentance, lest the market of the gospel should be removed and the vision cease.

(2) A man's personal day of grace may expire. What if that time should come when God says the means of grace shall do no good: ordinances will have "a miscarrying womb and dry breasts" (Hos 9.14)? Is it not sad to adjourn repentance till such a decree is given? It is true, no man can justly tell that his day of grace is past, but there are two shrewd signs by which he may fear it:

(a) When his conscience is done preaching. Conscience is a heart-preacher. Sometimes it convinces; sometimes it reproves. It says, as Nathan said to David, "you are the man" (2Sam 12.7). But a man may imprison this preacher; and God may then say to his conscience, preach no more: "Let the one who is filthy remain filthy!" (Rev 22.11). It is a fatal sign that a man's day of grace is past.

(b) When a person is in such a spiritual lethargy that nothing will work upon him or make him sensible. There is "the spirit of deep sleep poured out upon you" (Isa 29.10). This is a sad presage that his day of grace is past. How dangerous then is it to delay repentance when

the day of grace may so soon expire!

(3) The day of life may expire. What security do we have that we shall live another day? We are marching quickly out of the world. We are going off the stage. Our life is a candle soon blown out. Man's life is compared to the flower of the field which withers sooner than the grass (Psa 103.15). Our age is as nothing (Psa 39.5). Life is but a flying shadow. The body is like a vessel filled with a little breath. Sickness broaches this vessel; death draws it out. O how soon the scene may alter! Many a virgin has been dressed the same day in her bride-apparel and her burial gown! How dangerous then is it to adjourn repenting when death may so suddenly make a thrust at us. Do not say not that you will repent tomorrow. Remember that speech of Aquinas: "God who pardons the one who repents has not promised to give him tomorrow to repent in."[60] I have read of Archias, a Greek king from Laconia, who was partying when someone delivered him a letter; he desired the king to read the letter immediately, because it was about serious business. He replied, "seria eras" ("I will mind serious things tomorrow"); and on that day he was slain. Thus, while men think to spin out their silver thread, death cuts it off. Olaus Magnus[61] observes of the birds of Norway that they fly faster than the birds of any other country. It is not that their wings are swifter than others, but by an instinct of nature, knowing the days in that climate are very short (not above three hours long), they therefore hasten to their nests. So we, knowing the shortness of our lives and how quickly we may be called away by death, should fly so much faster on the wing of repentance to heaven.

But some will say that they do not fear a sudden surprise; they will repent on their sickbed. I do not much like a sickbed repentance. The man who risks his salvation in the space of a few short minutes runs a desperate hazard. You who put off repentance till sickness, answer me these four queries:

(a) How do you know that you will have a time of sickness? Death does not always shoot its warning-piece by a lingering consumption. Some it arrests suddenly. What if God should quickly send you a summons to surrender your life?

(b) Suppose you should have a time of sickness; how do you know you will have the use of your senses? Many are unbalanced on their sickbed.

(c) Suppose you should have your senses; still, how do you know your mind will be in a fit state for such a work as repentance? Sickness so discomposes body and mind that you may be unable at such a time to care for your soul. In sickness, a man is scarcely fit to make his will, much less to make his peace. The apostle said, "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church" (James 5.14). He does not ask, "Is he sick? Let him pray," but "Let him call for the elders that they may pray over him." A sick man is most unfit to pray or repent; he is likely to make sick work of it. When the body is out of tune, the soul must jar in its devotion. Upon a sick bed, a person is more fit to exercise impatience than repentance. We read that at the pouring out of the fourth vial, when God struck the inhabitants and scorched them with fire, that "they blasphemed the name of God, and did not repent" (Rev 16.9). So when the Lord pours out his vial and scorches the body with a fever, the sinner is better fit to blaspheme than to repent.

(d) How do you, who put off everything until a sickbed, know that God will give you in that very juncture of time, the grace you need to repent? The Lord usually punishes neglect of repentance in time of health, with hardness of heart in time of sickness. You have in your lifetime repulsed the Spirit of God, and are you sure he will come at your call? You have not taken the first season, and perhaps you will never see another springtide of the Spirit again. Considering all this, may hasten your repentance. Do not lay too much weight upon a

sickbed. “Be diligent to come before winter” (2Tim 4.21). There is a winter of sickness and death coming. Therefore make haste to repent. Let your work be ready before winter. “Today, hear God’s voice” (Heb 3.7).

Chapter Nine

9. THE TRIAL OF OUR REPENTANCE, AND COMFORT FOR THE PENITENT

If any say they have repented, let me ask that they try themselves seriously by those seven adjuncts or effects of repentance which the apostle lays down in 2Cor 7.11:

1. Carefulness

The Greek word signifies a solicitous diligence or careful shunning all temptations to sin. The true penitent flies from sin as Moses did from the serpent.

2. Clearing ourselves

The Greek word is "apology." The sense is this: even if we are very careful, the strength of temptation may still cause us to slip into sin. Now in this case, the repenting soul will not let sin lie festering in his conscience; instead he judges himself for his sin. He pours out tears before the Lord. He begs mercy in the name of Christ, and he never leaves till he has gotten his pardon. Here he is cleared of guilt in his conscience, and he is able to make an apology for himself against Satan.

3. Indignation

For someone who repents of sin, his spirit rises against it, just as his blood might rise at the sight of a person he mortally hates. Indignation is being outraged in his heart with his sin. The penitent is vexed with himself. David calls himself a fool and a beast (Psa 73.22). God is never better pleased with us than when we have a falling out with ourselves for sin.

4. Fear

A tender heart is ever a trembling heart. The penitent has felt sin's bitterness. This hornet has stung him and now, having hopes that God is reconciled, he is afraid to come near sin any more. The repenting soul is full of fear. He is afraid to lose God's favor which is better than life. For want of diligence, he is afraid he might come short of salvation. He is afraid that, after his heart has been softened, the waters of repentance might freeze and he would harden in sin again. "Happy is the man that always fears" (Pro 28.14). A sinner is like the leviathan that is made without fear (Job 41.33). A repenting person fears and does not sin; a graceless person sins and does not fear.

5. Vehement desire

Just as sour sauce sharpens the appetite, so the bitter herbs of repentance sharpen desire. But what does the penitent desire? He desires more power against sin, and to be released from it. It is true that he has gotten loose from Satan, but he is like an escaped prisoner with a fetter on his leg. He cannot walk with freedom and swiftness in the ways of God. He therefore desires to have the fetters of sin removed. He wants to be freed from corruption. He cries out with Paul: "who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7.24). In short, he desires to be with Christ, just as everything, at its center, desires to be.

6. Zeal

Desire and zeal are fitly put together to show that true desire pushes itself with zealous endeavor. How the penitent stirs himself in the business of salvation! How he takes the kingdom of heaven by force! (Mat 11.12) Zeal quickens the pursuit of glory. Zeal, encountering difficulty, is emboldened by opposition and it tramples upon danger. Zeal makes a repenting soul persist

in godly sorrow against all discouragements and oppositions whatever. Zeal carries a man above himself for God's glory. Before conversion Paul was madly against the saints (Act 26.11); and after conversion he was judged mad for Christ's sake: "Paul, you are beside yourself" (Act 26.24). But it was zeal, not insanity. Zeal animates spirit and duty. It causes fervency in religion, which is like fire to the sacrifice (Rom 12.11). As fear is a bridle to sin, so zeal is a spur to duty.

7. Revenge

A true penitent pursues his sins with a holy malice. He seeks their death just as Samson was avenged on the Philistines for his two eyes. He uses his sins as the Jews used Christ. He gives them gall and vinegar to drink. He crucifies his lusts (Gal 5.24). A true child of God seeks to be revenged most of all for those sins which have dishonored God the most. Cranmer, who had signed the popish articles with his right hand, was revenged on himself; he put his right hand first into the fire.[62] David by sin defiled his bed; afterwards by repentance he watered his bed with tears. Israel had sinned by idolatry, and afterwards they offered disgrace to their idols: "You shall defile also the covering of your graven images of silver" (Isa 30.22). Mary Magdalene had sinned in her eye by adulterous glances, and now she will be revenged on her eyes. She washes Christ's feet with her tears. She had sinned in her hair. It had entangled her lovers. Now she will be revenged on her hair; she wipes the Lord's feet with it. The Israelite women who had dressed themselves by the hour, and lent their mirrors to pride, afterwards, by way of revenge as well as zeal, offered their mirrors to be used in the service of God's tabernacle (Exo 38.8). So too, those conjurers who used curious arts or magic (as it is translated in the Syriac), once they repented, brought their books and burned them by way of revenge (Act 19.19).

These are the blessed fruits and products of repentance; and if we can find these in our souls, then we have arrived at that repentance which is never to be repented of (2Cor 7.10).

A Necessary Caution

For those who have solemnly repented of their sins, let me speak to them by way of caution. Though repentance is so necessary and excellent, as you have heard, take heed that you do not ascribe too much to repentance. The papists are guilty of a double error:

(1) They make repentance a sacrament. Christ never made it so. And who may institute sacraments but the who can give virtue to them? Repentance cannot be a sacrament because it lacks an outward sign. And a sacrament cannot properly be sacrament without a sign.

(2) The papists make repentance meritorious. They say it merits pardon ex congruo (altogether fittingly). This is a gross error. Indeed repentance prepares us for mercy. Just as the plow, when it breaks up the ground, prepares it for the seed, so when the heart is broken up by repentance, it is prepared for remission – but it does not merit it. God will not save us without repentance, nor will he save us for repentance. It is a qualification, not a cause. I grant that repenting tears are precious. They are, as Gregory said, "the fat of the sacrifice;" as Basil said, "the medicine of the soul;" and as Bernard said, "the wine of angels." Yet, tears are not satisfactory for sin. We drop sin with our tears; therefore they cannot satisfy. Augustine said it well: "I have read of Peter's tears, but no man ever read of Peter's satisfaction." Only Christ's blood can merit pardon. We please God by repentance, but we do not satisfy him by it. To trust in our repentance is to make it a Savior. Though repentance helps to purge the filth of sin, it is Christ's blood that washes away the guilt of sin. Therefore, do not idolize repentance. Do not rest on this: that your heart has been wounded for your sin. Rather, rest on the fact that your Savior has been wounded for your sin. When you have wept, say with Peter: "Lord Jesus, wash my tears in your blood."

Comfort for the Repenting Sinner

Let me in the next place speak by way of comfort. Christian, has God given you a repenting heart? If so, know these three things for your everlasting comfort:

1. Your sins are pardoned

Pardon of sin circumscribes blessedness within it. (Psa 32.1). Whom God pardons he crowns: "who forgives all your iniquities, who crowns you with lovingkindness" (Psa 103.34). A repenting condition is a pardoned condition. Christ said to that weeping woman, "Your sins, which are many, are forgiven" (Luk 7.47). Pardons are sealed on soft hearts. O you whose head has been a fountain to weep for sin, Christ's side will be a fountain to wash away sin (Zec 13.1). Have you repented? God looks at you as if you had not offended. He becomes a friend, a father. He will now bring out the best robe and put it on you. God is pacified towards you and will, as with the father of the prodigal, fall upon your neck and kiss you. Sin in Scripture is compared to a cloud (Isa 44.22). No sooner is this cloud scattered by repentance than pardoning love shines forth. Paul, after his repentance, obtained mercy: "I was all bestrewed with mercy" (1Tim 1.16). When a spring of repentance is open in the heart, a spring of mercy is open in heaven.

2. God will pass an act of oblivion

He forgives sin in such a way that he forgets: "I will remember their sin no more" (Jer 31.34). Have you been penitentially humbled? The Lord will never upbraid you with your former sins. After Peter wept, we never read that Christ upbraided him with his denial of him. God has cast your sins into the depths of the sea (Mic 7.19). How? Not as cork, but as lead. The Lord will never in a judicial way account for them. When he pardons, God is as a creditor that blots the debt out of his book (Isa 43.25). Some ask the question, whether the sins of the godly will be mentioned at the last day. The Lord said he will not remember them, and he is blotting them out, so if their sins are mentioned, it shall not be to their prejudice, for the debt-book is crossed.

3. Conscience will now speak peace

O the music of conscience! Conscience is turned into a paradise, and there a Christian sweetly solaces himself and plucks the flowers of joy (2Cor 1.12). The repenting sinner can go to God with boldness in prayer and look upon him not as a judge, but as a father. He is "born of God" and is heir to a kingdom (Luk 6.20). He is encircled with promises. He no sooner shakes the tree of the promise than some fruit falls from it.

To conclude, the true penitent may look on death with comfort. His life has been a life of tears, and now at death all tears will be wiped away. Death will not be a destruction, but a deliverance from jail. Thus you see what great comfort remains for repenting sinners. Luther said that before his conversion he could not endure that bitter word "repentance;" but afterwards he found much sweetness in it.

Chapter Ten

10. REMOVING THE IMPEDIMENTS TO REPENTANCE

Before I lay down the expedients and means that are conducive to repentance, I will first remove the impediments to it. In this great city, when you lack water, you search for the cause, whether the pipes are broken or stopped, or that the current of water is hindered. Likewise, when no water of repentance comes (even though we have the conduit pipes of the ordinances), we search to see what the cause is. What is the obstruction so that these penitential waters do not run?

There are ten impediments to repentance:

1. Men do not apprehend that they need repentance

They thank God that all is well with them, and they know nothing that they should repent of: "you say, 'I am rich, and need nothing'" (Rev 3.I7). Someone who does not apprehend any sickness in his body will not take the medicine prescribed for it. This is the mischief that sin has done; it has not only made us sick, but senseless. When the Lord asked the people to return to him, they answered stubbornly, "In what shall we return?" (Mal. 3.7). So when God asks men to repent, they say, "Why should we repent?" They know nothing that they have done amiss. There is surely no disease worse than apoplexy.[63]

2. People conceive it an easy thing to repent

It is only saying a few prayers: a sigh, or a "Lord have mercy," and the work is done. This conceit of the easiness of repentance is a great hindrance to it. If it makes a person bold and adventurous in sin then it must obstruct repentance. This opinion that repentance is easy, makes a person bold in sin. The angler can let out his line as far as he will and then pull it in again. Likewise, when a man thinks he can lash out in sin as far as he wants, and then pull in by repentance whenever he pleases, this must embolden him in his wickedness. But to take away this false conceit of the easiness of repentance, consider these:

(1) A wicked man has a mountain of guilt upon him; is it easy to stand up under such a weight? Is salvation per saltum (obtained with a leap)? Can a man jump out of sin into heaven? Can he leap out of the devil's arms into Abraham's embrace?

(2) If all the power in a sinner is employed against repentance, then repentance is not easy. All the faculties of a natural man are joined with sin: "I have loved foreigners, and I will go after them" (Jer 2.25). A sinner would rather lose Christ and heaven than his lusts. Death, which parts man and wife, will not part a wicked man and his sins. Is it so easy to repent? The angel rolled away the stone from the sepulcher; but only God himself can roll the stone away from the heart.

3. Presumptuous thoughts of God's mercy

Many suck poison from this sweet flower. Christ came into the world to save sinners (1Tim 1.15); yet accidentally this is the occasion for many a man's perishing. Though to the elect Christ is the bread of life, to the wicked he is "a stumbling stone" (1Pet 2.8). To some his blood is sweet wine; to others it is the water of Marah.[64] Some are softened by this Sun of righteousness (Mal. 4.2); others are hardened by it. "Oh," says one, "Christ has died; he has done it all for me; therefore I may sit still and do nothing." Thus he sucks death from the tree of life, and he perishes by a Savior. I may say the same of God's mercy. It is accidentally the cause of many a man's ruin. Because of mercy, men presume and think that they may continue

in sin; but should a king's clemency make his subjects rebel? The psalmist says there is mercy with God so that he may be feared (Psa 130.4), not so that we may sin. Can men expect mercy by provoking justice? God will hardly show those mercy who sin because mercy abounds.[65]

4. A lazy sluggish attitude

Repentance is looked upon as a tedious thing, requiring great effort; but men are content with their dregs and do not care to stir. They would rather go sleeping to hell than weeping to heaven. "A slothful man hides his hand in his vest" (Pro 19.24); he will not strike his breast.[66] Many would rather lose heaven than ply the oar and row on the waters of repentance. We cannot have the world citra pulverem (without labor and diligence); would we not rather have what is more excellent? Sloth is the cancer of the soul: "Slothfulness tosses into a deep sleep" (Pro 19.15).

It was a witty fiction of the poets that when Mercury put Argus to sleep and closed his eyes with an enchanted flute, he then killed him. It is no fiction that when Satan has lulled men to sleep in sloth by his witcheries, he then destroys them. Some report that while the crocodile sleeps with its mouth open, the Indian rat gets into its belly and eats up its entrails. So too while men sleep in false security, they are devoured.

5. The tickling pleasure of sin: 'who had pleasure in unrighteousness' (2 Thes 2.12)

Sin is a sugared draft mixed with poison. The sinner thinks there is danger in sin, but there is also delight - and the danger does not terrify him as much as the delight bewitches him. Plato calls love of sin a great devil. Delighting in sin hardens the heart. In true repentance, there must be grieving for sin; but how can one grieve for what he loves? The one who delights in sin can hardly pray against it. His heart is so urged by sin that he is afraid to leave it too soon. Samson doted on Delilah's beauty, but her lap proved to be his grave. When a man rolls iniquity like a sugared lump under his tongue,[67] it infatuates him, and it will be his death in the end. Delight in sin is a silken halter.[68] Will it not be bitter in the end? (2Sam 2.26)

6. An opinion that repentance will take away our joy

But that is a mistake. It does not crucify our joy but clarifies it, and removes it from the attractive dregs of sin. What is all earthly joy? It is but hilaris insania (a pleasant insanity). Falsa inter gaudia noctem egerimus (Virgil).[69] Worldly mirth is like a feigned laugh: sorrow follows at its heels. Like the magician's rod, it is instantly turned into a serpent. But divine repentance, like Samson's lion, has honeycomb in it.[70] God's kingdom consists as much in joy as in righteousness (Rom 14.17). None are so truly cheerful as penitent ones. Est quaedam flere voluptas (Ovid).[71]

The oil of joy is poured chiefly into a broken heart: "the oil of joy for mourning" (Isa 61.3). In the fields near Palermo grow a great many reeds in which there is sweet juice; sugar is made from it. Likewise in a penitent heart (which is the bruised reed), grow the sugared joys of God's Spirit. God turns the water of tears into the juice of the grape, which exhilarates and makes the heart glad. Who should rejoice if not the repenting soul? He is heir to all the promises, and is not that a matter for joy? God dwells in a contrite heart, and must there not be joy there? "I dwell with the one who has a contrite spirit, to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa 57.15). Repentance does not take away a Christian's music, but it does sound a higher note, and makes it sweeter.

7. Another obstacle to repentance is despondency of mind

It is a futile thing for me, says the sinner, to begin to repent; my sins are so great that there is no hope for me. "Return now every one from his evil way ... And they said, There is no hope" (Jer 18.11-12). Our sins are mountains; how will these ever be thrown into the sea? Where unbelief represents sin to our soul in its bloody colors, and God in his judge's robes, the soul would sooner fly from God than to him. This is dangerous. Other sins need mercy, but despair rejects mercy. It throws the cordial[72] of Christ's blood on the ground. Judas was not only damned for his treason and murder, but it was his distrust of God's mercy that destroyed him. Why should we entertain such hard thoughts of God? He has a deep love for repenting sinners (Joe 2.13). Mercy rejoices over justice. God's anger is not so hot that mercy cannot cool it; nor is it so sharp that mercy cannot sweeten it. God considers his mercy to be his glory (Exo 33.18-19). We have some drops of mercy ourselves, but God is "the Father of mercies" (2Cor 1.3); He is the one who reproduces all the mercies that are in us. He is the God of tenderness and compassion. No sooner do we mourn than God's heart melts. No sooner do our tears fall, than God's compassions kindle (Hos 11.8). Do not say then that there is no hope. Disband the army of your sins, and God will sound a retreat to his judgments. Remember, great sins have been swallowed up in the sea of God's infinite compassions. Manasseh made the streets run with blood, yet when his head was a fountain of tears, God grew favorable.

8. Hope of impunity

Men flatter themselves in sin and think that God, having spared them all this while, never intends to punish them. Because the judgments are put off, surely there will be no judgments at all. "He has said in his heart, 'God has forgotten: he hides his face;' he will never see it" (Psa 10.11). The Lord is indeed longsuffering towards sinners, and by his patience he would bribe them to repentance - but here is their wretchedness: because he forbears to punish, they forbear to repent. Know that the lease of patience will soon run out. There is a time when God will say, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man" (Gen 6.3). A creditor may forbear his debtor, but forbearance does not excuse the payment. God takes notice how long the glass of his patience has been running: "I gave her space to repent; and she did not repent" (Rev 2.21). Jezebel added impenitence to her incontinency, and what followed? "Behold, I will throw her into a bed" (Rev 2.22), not a bed of pleasure, but a bed of languishing where she will be consumed in her iniquity. The longer God's arrow is drawn, the deeper it will wound. Sins against patience will make a man's hell so much the hotter.

9. The next impediment of repentance is fear of reproach

"If I repent I will expose myself to scorn." The heathen would say, "When you apply yourself to the study of wisdom, be prepared for sarcasm and reproach." But consider well who they are that reproach you. They are ignorant of God and spiritually mad. Are you bothered by the reproach of those who are not in their right wits? Who minds a madman laughing at him?

What do the wicked reproach you for? Is it because you repent? You are doing your duty. Bind their reproaches like a crown around your head. It is better to have men reproach you for repenting, than to have God damn you for not repenting.

If you cannot bear a reproach for religion, then never call yourself Christian. Luther said, "Christianus quasi crucianus" (a Christian is as if crucified). Suffering is a saint's livery.[73] And what are reproaches? They are but chips off the cross, which should be despised rather than laid to heart.

10. The last impediment of repentance is immoderate love of the world

No wonder Ezekiel's hearers were hardened into rebellion when their hearts went after

covetousness (Eze 33.31). The world so engrosses men's time and bewitches their affections that they cannot repent. They would rather put gold in their bag than tears in God's bottle. I have read of the Turks that they pay no heed to churches or altars, but they are diligent in looking after their crops. Likewise, many rarely give heed to repentance - they care more about breaking up clods of dirt with their plow, than breaking up the fallow ground of their hearts. The thorns choke the word. We read of those who were invited to Christ's supper, and who put him off with worldly excuses. The first said, "I bought a piece of ground, and I must go see it: I ask that you excuse me. Another said, 'I bought five yoke of oxen ...'" (Luk 14. 18-19). The farm and the shop take up so much of people's time that they have no free time for their souls. Their golden weights[74] hinder their silver tears. There is an herb in the country of Sardinia, like balm, which makes them die laughing if they eat too much of it. The world is such an herb (or rather, weed), if men eat immoderately of it. Instead of dying repenting, they will die laughing.

These are the obstructions to repentance which must be removed so that the current of water may flow clearer.

Chapter Eleven

11. PRESCRIBING SOME MEANS FOR REPENTANCE:

(1) Serious Consideration

In the last place I will prescribe some rules or means conducive to repentance.

The first means conducive to repentance is serious consideration: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet toward your testimonies" (Psa 119.59). The prodigal, when he came to his senses, seriously considered his riotous luxuries; and then he repented. Peter wept when he thought of Christ's words. There are certain things which, if they were well considered, would be a means to make us break off a course of sinning.

1. Firstly, consider seriously what sin is.

Be assured, there is enough evil in sin to make us repent. There are these twenty evils in sin:

(1) Every sin is a recession from God (Jer 2.5). God is the supreme good, and our blessedness lies in union with him. But sin, like a strong bias, draws the heart away from God. The sinner takes his leave of God. He bids farewell to Christ and mercy. Every step forward in sin is a step backward from God: "they have forsaken the Lord, they have gone backward" (Isa 1.4). The further one goes from the sun, the nearer he approaches darkness. The further the soul goes from God, the nearer it approaches misery.

(2) Sin is walking contrary to God (Lev 26.27). The same word in Hebrew signifies both to sin and to rebel. Sin is opposite to God. If God is of one mind, then sin will be of another. If God says to sanctify the Sabbath, then sin says to profane it. Sin strikes at God's very being. If sin could help it, God would no longer be God: "Make the Holy One of Israel cease to confront us" (Isa 30.11). What a horrible thing this is, for a piece of proud dust to rise up in defiance against its Maker!

(3) Sin is an offense to God. It violates his laws. Here is crimen laesue majestatis (grievous high treason). What greater injury can be given a prince than to trample on his royal edicts? A sinner holds the statutes of heaven in contempt: "they toss your law behind their backs" (Neh. 9.26), as if they scorned to look at it. Sin robs God of his due. You injure a man when you do not give him his due. The soul belongs to God. He has a double claim to it: it is his by creation and by purchase. Thus sin steals the soul from God, and gives to the devil what rightly belongs to God.

(4) Sin is profound ignorance. The Schoolmen say that all sin is founded in ignorance. If men knew God in his purity and justice they would not dare go on in a course of sinning: "they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, says the Lord" (Jer 9.3). Therefore ignorance and lust are joined together (1Pet 1.14). Ignorance is the womb of lust. Vapors arise mostly in the night. The black vapors of sin arise mostly in a dark ignorant soul. Satan throws a mist before a sinner so that he does not see the flaming sword of God's wrath. The eagle first rolls himself in the sand and then it flies at the stag; by fluttering its wings, it dusts the stag's eyes so that it cannot see, and then it strikes it with its talons. In the same way, Satan, that eagle or prince of the air, first blinds men with ignorance, and then he wounds them with his arrows of temptation. Is sin ignorance? If so, there is great cause to repent of ignorance.

(5) Sin is a piece of desperateness. In every transgression. a man runs an obvious risk of his soul. He treads on the brink of the bottomless pit. Foolish sinner! You never commit a sin, but

you do what may undo your soul forever. If someone drinks poison, it is a wonder if it does not cost him his life. One taste of the forbidden tree lost Adam paradise. One sin of the angels lost them heaven. One sin of Saul lost him his kingdom. The next sin you commit, God may clap you up as a prisoner among the damned. You who gallop on in sin, it is a question whether God will spare your life a day longer or give you a heart to repent, so that you are desperate even to a frenzy.

(6) Sin smears with filth. In James 1.21 sin is called "filthiness." The Greek word signifies the pus of ulcers. Sin is called an abomination (Deu 7.25); indeed it is plural, abominations (Deu 20.18). This filthiness in sin is inward. A spot on the face may easily be wiped off; but to have the liver and lungs tainted is far worse. Sin is a pollution that has gotten into the mind and the conscience (Titus 1.15). It is compared to a menstruous cloth (Isa 30.22), the most unclean thing under the law. A sinner's heart is like a field that is spread with dung. Some think that sin is an ornament; but it is rather an excrement. Sin so smears a person with filth that God cannot abide the sight of him: "my soul loathed them" (Zec 11.8).

(7) In sin there is odious ingratitude. God has fed you, O sinner, with angels' food. He has crowned you with a variety of mercies, yet you continue in sin? As David said of Nabal: "in vain I have protected this man's sheep" (1Sam 25.21). Likewise in vain has God done so much for the sinner. All God's mercies may upbraid, even accuse the ungrateful person. God may say he gave you wit, health, riches, and you employed all these against him: "I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal" (Hos 2.8); I sent provisions and they served their idols with them. The frozen snake in the fable stung the one who brought it to the fire and gave it warmth.[75] So a sinner tries to sting God with his own mercies. "Is this your kindness to your friend?" (2Sam 16.17). Did God give you life in order to sin? Did he give you wages in order to serve the devil?

(8) Sin is a debasing thing. It degrades a person of his honor: "I will make your grave; for you are vile" (Nah. 1.14). This was spoken of a king. He was not vile by birth but by sin. Sin blots our name, and taints our blood. Nothing so changes a man's glory into shame as sin. It is said of Naaman, "He was a great man and honorable, but he was a leper" (2 Kng 5.1). However great a man may be with worldly pomp, if he is wicked, then he is a leper in God's eye. To boast of sin is to boast of our infamy, as if a prisoner should boast of his fetters or be proud of his halter.

(9) Sin is a damage. In every sin there is infinite loss. No one ever thrived by grazing on this pasture. What does one lose? He loses God; he loses his peace; he loses his soul. The soul is a divine spark lighted from heaven; it is the glory of creation. What can compensate for this loss? (Mat 16.26) If the soul is gone, then the treasure is gone; therefore there is infinite loss in sin. Sin is such a trade that whoever pursues it is sure to be ruined.

(10) Sin is a burden: "My iniquities have gone over my head: like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me" (Psa 38.4). The sinner goes around with weights and fetters on him. The burden of sin is always worst when it is felt least. Sin is a burden wherever it goes. Sin burdens God: "I am pressed under you, as a cart full of sheaves is pressed down" (Amos 2.13). Sin burdens the soul. What a weight did Spira feel?[76] The conscience of Judas was so burdened, that he hanged himself to quiet his conscience! Those who carry such a burden know what sin is, and will repent.

(11) Sin is a debt. It is compared to a debt of ten thousand talents (Mat 18.24). Of all the debts we owe, our sins are the worst. With other debts, a sinner may flee to foreign lands, but with sin he cannot. "Where shall I flee from your presence?" (Psa 139.7). God knows where to find

all his debtors. Death frees a man from other debts, but it will not free him from this. It is not the death of the debtor, but of the creditor, that discharges this debt.

(12) There is deceitfulness in sin (Heb 3.13). "The wicked man does deceptive work" (Pro 11.18). Sin is a mere cheat. While it pretends to please us, it actually beguiles us! Sin does as Jael did. First she brought the milk and butter to Sisera, and then she struck the nail through his temples so that he died (Judg. 5.26). Sin first courts, and then it kills. It is first a fox, and then a lion. Whoever sin kills, it betrays. Those locusts in Revelation are the perfect symbols and emblems of sin: "on their heads were crowns like gold, and they had hair like women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions, and there were stingers in their tails" (Rev 9.710). Sin is like the usurer who feeds a man with money and then makes him mortgage his land. Sin feeds the sinner with delightful objects, and then he makes him mortgage his soul. Judas pleased himself with the thirty pieces of silver, but they proved deceitful riches. Ask him now how he likes his bargain.

(13) Sin is a spiritual sickness. One man is sick of pride, another of lust, another of malice. It is with a sinner as it is with a sick patient: his palate is corrupted, and the sweetest things taste bitter to him. So the word of God, which is sweeter than the honeycomb, tastes bitter to a sinner: "They put sweet for bitter" (Isa 5.20). And if sin is a disease, then it is not to be cherished, but rather cured by repentance.

(14) Sin is a bondage. It binds a man as an apprentice to the devil. Of all conditions, servitude is the worst. Every man is bound with the cords of his own sin. "I was held before conversion," said Augustine, "not with an iron chain, but with the obstinacy of my will."[77] Sin is imperious and tyrannical. It is called a law (Rom 8.2) because it has such a binding power over a man. The sinner must do as sin will have him do. He does not so much enjoy his lusts as serve them, and he will have work enough to do to gratify them all. "I have seen princes going on foot" (Eccles. 10.7); the soul, that princely thing which once sat in a chair of state and was crowned with knowledge and holiness, is now made a lackey to sin and it runs the devil's errands.

(15) Sin has a spreading malignity in it. It hurts not only a man's self, but others. One man's sin may cause many to sin, just as one beacon being lit may cause all the beacons in the country to be lit. One man may help to defile many. A person who has the plague, going into company, does not know how many will be infected by him with the plague. You who are guilty of open sins do not know how many have been infected by you. For all you know, there may be many in hell crying out that they would never have come there if it had not been for your bad example.

(16) Sin is a troublesome thing. It brings trouble with it. The curse which God laid upon the woman is most truly laid upon every sinner: "in sorrow you will bear it" (Gen 3.16). A man troubles his thoughts with plotting sin; and when sin is conceived, it is born in sorrow.[78] Like one who takes a great deal of pain to open a floodgate, when he has opened it, the flood drowns him. So a man beats his brains to contrive sin, and then it troubles his conscience, brings crosses to his estate, and rots the walls and timbers of his house (Zec 5.4).

(17) Sin is an absurd thing. What greater indiscretion is there than to gratify an enemy? Sin gratifies Satan. When lust or anger burn in the soul, Satan warms himself at the fire. Men's sins feed the devil. Samson was called out to be made sport of by the lords of the Philistines (Judg. 16.25). Likewise the sinner is the devil's entertainment. It is meat and drink for him to see men sin. How he laughs to see them risking their souls for the world, as if one should risk diamonds for straws, or should fish for bait with golden hooks. Every wicked man will be

indicted as a fool at the Day of Judgment.

(18) There is cruelty in every sin. With every sin you commit, you stab your soul. While you are kind to sin, you are cruel to yourself, like the man in the Gospel who cut himself with stones till he bled (Mar 5.5). The sinner is like the jailer who drew a sword to kill himself (Act 16.27). The soul may rightly cry out, "I am murdering." Naturalists say the hawk chooses to drink blood rather than water. So sin drinks the blood of souls.

(19) Sin is a spiritual death: "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2.1). Augustine said that before his conversion, reading of the death of Dido, he could not refrain from weeping. "But wretch that I was," he said, "I bewailed the death of Dido who was forsaken by Aeneas, and I did not bewail the death of my soul that was forsaken by God." The life of sin is the death of the soul.

A dead man has no sense. So an unregenerate person has no sense of God in him (Eph 4.19). Persuade him to mind his salvation? To what purpose would you make orations to a dead man? Reprove him for his vice? To what purpose would you strike a dead man?

The one who is dead has no taste. Set a banquet before him, and he does not relish it. Likewise, a sinner tastes no sweetness in Christ or in a promise. They are cordials in a dead man's mouth.

The dead putrefy. Martha said of Lazarus, "Lord, by this time he stinks: for he has been dead four days" (Joh 11.39). How much more may we say of a wicked man who has been dead in sin for thirty or forty years, "by this time he stinks"!

(20) Sin without repentance tends toward final damnation. As the rose perishes by the canker bred in itself, so men perish by the corruptions which breed in their souls. What was once said to the Grecians of the Trojan horse, "This engine is made to be the destruction of your city," the same may be said to every impenitent person, "This engine of sin will be the destruction of your soul." Sin's last scene is always tragic. Diagoras Florentinus would drink poison in jest, but it cost him his life.[79] Men drink the poison of sin in merriment, but it costs them their souls: "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6.23). What Solomon said of wine may also be said of sin: at first "it gives his color in the cup. At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder" (Pro 23.31-32). Christ tells us of the worm and the fire (Mar 9.48). Sin is like oil, and God's wrath is like fire. As long as the damned continue sinning, so the fire will continue scorching, and "who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (Isa 33.14). But men question the truth of this, and are like impious Devonax who, being threatened with hell for his villainies, mocked it and said, "I will believe there is a hell when I come there, and not before." We cannot make hell enter into men until they enter into hell.

Thus we have seen the deadly evil in sin which, seriously considered, may make us repent and turn to God. If, for all this, men persist in sin and are resolved to take a voyage to hell, who can help it? They have been told what a soul-damning rock sin is; but if they voluntarily run into it and split themselves, then their blood is on their own head.

2. The second serious consideration is the mercies of God.

A stone is soonest broken upon a soft pillow, and a heart of stone is soonest broken upon the soft pillow of God's mercies: "the goodness of God leads you to repentance" (Rom 2.4). The clemency of a prince sooner causes relenting in a malefactor. While God has been storming others by his judgments, he has been wooing you by his mercies.

(1) What private mercies have we had? What mischiefs have been prevented, what fears

have blown over? When our foot has been slipping, God's mercy has held us up (Psa 94.18). Mercy has always been a screen between us and danger. When enemies like lions have risen up against us to devour us, free grace has snatched us out of the mouth of these lions. In the deepest waves, the arm of mercy has been under and has kept our head above water. And will not this privative mercy lead us to repentance?

(2) What positive mercies we have had! Firstly, in supplying mercy. God has been a bountiful benefactor: "the God which fed me all my life to this day" (Gen 48.15). What man would spread a table for his enemy? Yet we have been enemies of God, and he has fed us. He has given us the horn of oil. He has made the honeycomb of mercy drop on us. God has been as kind to us as if we had been his best servants. And will this supplied mercy not lead us to repentance? Secondly, in delivering mercy. When we have been at the gates of the grave, God has miraculously spun out our lives. He has turned the shadow of death into morning, and has put a song of deliverance into our mouth. And will not delivering mercy lead us to repentance? The Lord has labored to break our hearts with his mercies. In Judges, chapter 2, we read that when the angel (which was a prophet) had preached a sermon of mercy, "the people lifted up their voice and wept" (v. 4). If anything moves us to tears, it should be the mercy of God. If these great cable-ropes of God's mercy will not draw someone to repentance, he is an obstinate sinner indeed.

3. In the third place, consider God's afflictive providences.

See if our distillery will not drip when a fire is put under it. God has sent us in recent years to the school of the cross. He has twisted his judgments together. He has made good upon us those two threats, "I will be to Ephraim as a moth" (Hos 5.12). Has not God been so to England in the decay of trading? And "I will be to Ephraim as a lion" (Hos 5.14). Has he not been so to England in the devouring plague?[80] All this while God waited for our repentance. But we went on in sin: "I paid attention and heard, but no man repented of his wickedness, saying, 'What have I done?'" (Jer 8.6). And lately God has been whipping us with a fiery rod in those tremendous flames in this city,[81] which were emblematic of the great conflagration at the last day when "the elements will melt with fervent heat" (2Pet 3.10). When Joab's corn was set on fire, he went running to Absalom (2Sam 14.31). God has set our houses on fire that we may run to him in repentance. "The Lord's voice cries to the city: hear the rod and who appointed it" (Mic 6.9). This is the language of the rod, so that we would humble ourselves under God's mighty hand and "break off our sins by righteousness" (Dan. 4.27). Manasseh's affliction ushered in repentance (2Chr 33.12). God uses this as the proper medicine for security. "Their mother has played the harlot" by idolatry (Hos 2.5). What course will God now take with her? "Therefore I will hedge your way with thorns" (Hos 2.6). This is God's method, to set a thorn-hedge of affliction in the way. Thus to a proud man, contempt is a thorn. To a lustful man, sickness is a thorn, both to stop him in his sin, and to goad him forward in repentance.

The Lord teaches his people as Gideon taught the men of Succoth: "He took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth" (Judg. 8.16). Here was tearing rhetoric. Likewise God has lately been teaching us humiliation by thorny providences. He has torn our golden fleece from us; he has brought our houses low so that he might bring our hearts low. When will we dissolve into tears if not now? God's judgments are such a proper a means to work repentance that the Lord wonders at it, and he makes it his complaint that his severity did not break men off from their sins: "I have withheld the rain from you" (Amos 4.7); "I have struck you with blasting and mildew" (Amos 4.9); "I have sent the pestilence among you" (Amos 4. 10). But still this is the burden of the complaint, "Yet you have not returned to me."

The Lord proceeds gradually in his judgments. Firstly, he sends a lesser cross to bear; and if that will not do, then a greater cross. He sends one a gentle fit of fever to begin with, and afterwards a burning fever. He sends another a loss at sea, then the loss of a child, and then of a husband. Thus by degrees he tries to bring men to repentance.

Sometimes God makes his judgments go in a circuit, from family to family. The cup of affliction has gone round the nation; all have tasted it. If we do not repent now, then we stand in contempt of God, and by implication we ask God to do his worst. Such a climax of wickedness will hardly be pardoned. "In that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning ... And behold joy and gladness ... And it was revealed in my ears by the Lord of hosts, 'Surely this iniquity will not be purged from you till you die'" (Isa 22.1214). That is, this sin will not be satisfied by sacrifice.

If the Romans severely punished a young man who in a time of public calamity was seen sporting in a window with a crown of roses on his head, then how much sorer will the punishment be for those who strengthen themselves in wickedness and laugh in the face of God's judgments? The heathen mariners in a storm repented (Jon 1.14). Not to repent now, and not to throw our sins overboard, is to be worse than the heathens.

4. Fourthly, let us consider how much we will have to answer for at last if we do not repent.

How many prayers, counsels, and admonitions will be added to the score? Every sermon will come as an indictment. As for those who have truly repented, Christ will answer for them. His blood will wash away their sins. The mantle of free grace will cover them. "In those days, says the Lord, the iniquity of Israel will be sought for, and there will be none; and also the sins of Judah, and they will not be found" (Jer 50.20). Those who have judged themselves in the lower court of conscience will be acquitted in the High Court of heaven. But if we do not repent, then our sins must be all accounted for at the last day, and we must answer for them ourselves, with no counsel allowed to plead for us.

O impenitent sinner, think how you will be able to look your judge in the face. The cause you have to plead is damned, and you must surely consider: "What then will I do when God rises up? And when he visits, what will I answer him?" (Job 31.14). Therefore, repent now, or else provide your answers, and see what defense you can make for yourself when you come before God's tribunal. But when God rises up, how will you answer him?

12. PRESCRIBING SOME MEANS FOR REPENTANCE (cont'd):

(2) Compare Penitent and Impenitent Conditions

The second help to repentance is a prudent comparison.

Compare penitent and impenitent conditions and see the difference. Spread them before your eyes, and by the light of the word see the impenitent condition as the most deplorable and the penitent as the most comfortable. How sad it was for the prodigal before he returned to his father! He had spent everything; he had sinned himself into beggary, and had nothing left but a few husks. He was a companion with the swine; but when he came home to his father, nothing was thought too good for him. The robe was brought to cover him, the ring to adorn him, and the fatted calf to feed him. If the sinner continues in his impenitency, then farewell Christ and mercy. But if he repents, then quickly he has a heaven within him. Then Christ is his, then all is peace. He may sing a requiem to his soul and say, "Soul, take your ease, you have many goods laid up" (Luk 12.19). Upon turning to God we have more restored to us in Christ than we ever lost in Adam. God says to the repenting soul, I will clothe you with the robe of righteousness; I will enrich you with the jewels and graces of my Spirit. I will bestow my love upon you; I will give you a kingdom: "Son, all I have is yours." O my friends, just compare your estate before repentance and after repentance. Before repenting, there is nothing to be seen but clouds and storms, clouds in God's face and storms in your conscience. But after repenting, how the weather has changed! What sunshine above! What serene calmness within! A Christian's soul is like Mount Olympus, all light and clear, and there are no winds blowing.

(3) A third means is a settled determination to leave sin.

Not a faint wish, but a resolved vow. "I have sworn that I will keep your righteous judgments" (Psa 119.106). All the delights and artifices of sin will not make me renounce my vow. There must be no hesitation, no consulting with flesh and blood, "Should I leave my sin or not?" But as with Ephraim, "What have I to do with idols anymore?" (Hos 14.8). I will not be engulfed by my sins anymore; I will no longer be fooled by Satan. This day I will put a bill of divorce into the hands of my lusts. Till we come to this peremptory resolution, sin will gain ground on us and we will never be able to shake off this viper. It is no wonder that someone who is not resolved to be an enemy of sin, is conquered by sin.

But this resolution must be built upon the strength of Christ more than our own. It must be a humble resolution. David, when he went against Goliath, put off his presumptuous confidence as well as his armor: "I come to you in the name of the Lord" (1Sam 17.45). So we must go out against our Goliath lusts, in the strength of Christ. It is usual for a person to make a bond with another. So, being conscious of our own inability to leave sin, let us bind ourselves to Christ, and engage his strength to mortify our corruption.

(4) The fourth means is earnest supplication.

The heathens laid one of their hands on the plow, and the other they lifted up to Ceres, the goddess of corn. So when we have used the means provided, let us look up to God for a blessing. Pray to him for a repenting heart: "You, Lord, who bid me to repent, give me grace to repent." Pray that our hearts may be a holy distillery, dripping tears. Beg of Christ to give us such a look of love as he gave to Peter, which made him go out and weep bitterly. Implore the

help of God's Spirit. It is the Spirit's striking on the rock of our hearts[82] that makes the waters gush out: "He causes his wind to blow and the waters flow" (Psa 147.18). When the wind of God's Spirit blows, then the water of tears will flow.

There is good reason we should go to God for repentance:

(1) Because it is his gift: "Then God also granted repentance to life to the Gentiles" (Act 11.18). The Arminians hold that it is in our power to repent. We can harden our hearts, but we cannot soften them. This crown of freewill has fallen from our head. No, there is not only impotency in us, but obstinacy (Act 7.51). Therefore beg God for a repentant spirit. He can make the stony heart bleed. His is a word of creative power.

(2) We must have recourse to God for blessing because he has promised to bestow it: "I will give you a heart of flesh" (Eze 36.26). I will soften your adamant hearts in my Son's blood: show God his hand and seal. And there is another gracious promise: "They will return to me with their whole heart" (Jer 24.7). Turn this promise into a prayer: Lord, give me grace to return to you with my whole heart.

(5) The fifth means is to pursue clearer discoveries of God

"Now my eye sees you. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42.56). Job, having surveyed God's glory and purity, as a humble penitent abhorred himself, or in Hebrew, he reprobated himself. By looking into the transparent glass of God's holiness, we see our own blemishes, and so we learn to regret them.

(6) Lastly, we should labor for faith.

But what is that to repentance? Yes, faith breeds union with Christ, and there can be no separation from sin till there is union with Christ. The eye of faith looks on mercy and that thaws the heart. Faith carries us to Christ's blood, and that blood mollifies it. Faith persuades us of the love of God, and that love sets us to weeping.

Thus I have laid down the means or helps to repentance. What remains now is only that we begin the work. And let us be in earnest, not as fencers but as warriors.

I will conclude with the words of the psalmist: "One who goes out and weeps, bearing precious seed, will doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psa 126.6).

This material is provided here solely for the edification of believers and the conviction of sinners. As far we can discern, this is not copyrighted material. If you know for a fact that it is, we would appreciate being informed so that we may take the proper steps to correct it. In the mean time enjoy the blessing of reading after this man of over 400 years ago while he pours out his heart in this matter that is so neglected in our day. 2/22/97

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Notes

[← 1]

John Chrysostom was made Archbishop of Constantinople in 398 by decree of the Roman Emperor Arcadius. John began to reform the imperial city and its clergy because corruption had overtaken them under his lax predecessor. His call to repentance included the emperor and especially his wife Eudoxia. She joined with John's opponents to have Arcadius remove him.

[←2]

A feeling of deep regret for some misdeed.

[←3]
Num 21.9

[←4]

"Sighs from the bottom of your heart."

[←5]

"The eyes are swollen with weeping."

[←6]

Selymus II (also "Selim"), Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, b. 1524, reigned 1566-1574. Basis for Wm Shakespeare's *Othello*.

[←7]

Latimer, Hugh (1485-1555) was one of the leading spokesmen for the Reformation. He was chaplain to King Henry VIII and in 1535 was made Bishop of Worcester. He was a favorite preacher in the royal court under Edward VI. Arrested during the persecution of Reformers under Queen Mary, Latimer, along with Nicholas Ridley, was burned at the stake in 1555. As the fires were lit, Latimer cried out to his companion, "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as I trust shall never be put out!"

[←8]
2Cor 7.9

[←9]

Paracelcus (1493–1541) was a famous Swiss physician, botanist, alchemist, astrologer, and occultist.

[← 10]

Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329– 390) – A Christian theologian who contributed much to the doctrine of the Trinity.

[←11]

Quoted from Virgil's *Aeneid* IX, 424-430 "Then it was that, terrified and out of his mind, Nisus cried out and could not hide himself in the darkness or bear such grief any more: 'Do it to me, to me, I'm here, the one who did it, turn your weapons onto me, Rutulians! The whole trick was mine, this one dared nothing, nor could he have; This sky and the stars that saw it are my witnesses: he only loved his unlucky friend too much.'"

[←12]

That is, we would not have to be judged by others in our outward conduct. We must be our own harshest critic and strictest disciplinarian in the sight of men. But in the sight of God, our soul may rest in the completed work of Christ: there is now no condemnation for those who do not walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom 8.1 NKJ).

[← 13]
Job 20.12-14

[← 14]

To dye in grain is to dye the raw material, such as wool or silk, before it is manufactured.

[← 15]

Mauricius Tiberius Augustus (539–602) was the Roman (Byzantine) Emperor from 582 to 602. His reign was a fiasco, and so Roman general Phocas usurped the throne, executing Maurice and his family; that precipitated a war with Persia.

[← 16]

Origen of Alexandria (c.185 - c.254); the first systematic theologian of the church; he was later declared a heretic.

[←17]
Prov 26.11

[←18]

That is, Plutarch's writings. Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus, *c.* 46-120 AD; a Greek historian, biographer, and essayist.

[← 19]

From Ovid's *Metaphorphoses*: "they make the gods the authors of their own wickedness."

[←20]
Luk 19.9

[←21]

The friend of Roman Emperor Julius Caesar who betrayed him and stabbed him to death.

[←22]

A Roman naturalist.

[←23]

In Greek mythology, Odysseus stayed with the sorceress Circe on her island. She turned Odysseus' men into swine. She offered Odysseus an enchanted cup that would likewise transform him into a beast.

[←24]

Third emperor of Rome, notorious for his drunkenness.

[←25]

That is, ‘Let him sail to Anticyra.' Hellebore was a plant found at Anticyra which was believed to be a cure for insanity.

[←26]

Dan 4.33

[←27]

"Schoolmen" refers to the theologians of *Scholasticism*, characterized by rigorous analysis and careful distinctions. The main figures were Anselm, Abelard, Albertus Magnus, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas.

[←28]

From the the 32nd epigram of Martial (*Marcus Valerius Martialis* c. 40-102 AD). He wrote satirical poems about the Roman aristocrats he knew during the reigns of Domitian, Nerva, and Trajan. The full quote is this: "I do not love you, Sabidius, nor can I say why. This only can I say: I do not love you."

[←29]

Exodus 17.14-16

[←30]

Mauricius Tiberius Augustus (539–602) was the Roman (Byzantine) Emperor from 582 to 602. His reign was a fiasco, and so Roman general Phocas usurped the throne, executing Maurice and his family; that precipitated a war with Persia.

[←31]

Perhaps referring to Jdg 1.27

[←32]

Italian lawyer Francis Spira. In 1548, Spira converted to Lutheranism and began to spread the Lutheran message to others. Under pressure from the Catholic Church, he renounced his Protestant faith. He became convinced he was a reprobate, destined for hell.

[←33]
Greek historian (484-425 BC).

[←34]

In Greek mythology, Niobe was the wife of the king of Thebes. She boasted of her twelve children. The goddess *Artemis* and her twin brother *Apollo* put Niobe's children to death. Her grief changed Niobe into a stone which shed tears in summer.

[←35]
2Kng 5.10

[←36]

Ancient astrologers thought that the planets influence a man's nature. Saturn was thought to exert a bad influence.

[←37]

That is, “If a fever that burns every third day, burns every fourth day instead, then it is no cure.”

[←38]

Psalm 58.4-5 – that is, let the serpent of sin be charmed, that we may obey the voice of God.

[←39]
1Sam 14.43

[←40]

NKJ **Jeremiah 31:19** Surely, after my turning, I repented; And after I was instructed, I struck myself on the thigh; I was ashamed, yes, even humiliated, Because I bore the reproach of my youth.' (NKJ)

[←41]

"The English race is the best at weeping" – quoted from Chamberlayne's *Anglicæ Notitia.*(1669)

[←42]
Zech 5.8

[←43]

In 1555, these were the last words of Protestant reformer John Bradford. He was burned at the stake by Catholic Mary I of England ("Bloody Mary"). Turning to the young man who would suffer death with him he said, "Be of good comfort, brother, for we shall have a happy supper with the Lord tonight." *Foxes Book of Martyrs*

[←44]
Mat 11.12

[←45]
1Tim 1.19

[←46]
1Sam 28.14

[←47]

It's theirs for the asking, and they can do with it whatever they want.

[←48]

Those who assert that there is no law any longer; they claim we may live in rabid disobedience and still be saved.

[←49]

"Who, in speaking such things, can abstain from tears?" (Virgil)

[←50]

The image is a meat pie with more crust and gravy than meat.

[←51]

Pliny, *Natural History*, 21, 1, “Echeneis,” and 9,25 [41]).

[←52]

An Old World plover (bird) having wattles and spurs.

[←53]

That is, a window sash.

[←54]

Nearchus (Nearchos; c. 360 - 300 BC) was one of the naval officers in the army of Alexander the Great. His celebrated voyage from India to Susa after Alexander's expedition in India is preserved in Arrian's account, the *Indica*.

[←55]

"That his love might be engraved throughout the whole frame."

[←56]

"Fluttering in song above the heavens"

[←57]

Roman Catholic bishop, a chief opponent of the Reformation of the sixteenth century. He urged the reintroduction of laws for the burning of Protestants.

[←58]

"Delay causes danger"

[←59]

Rev 2.1-5

[←60]

Probably from Aquinas' *Commentary on the Book of Job*, Chapter Seven, fourth lesson.

[←61]

Swedish cleric (1490-1558); he wrote a famous history of the Scandinavian people, their life and folklore.

[←62]

Thomas Cranmer (1489-1555) Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury under Henry VIII. He was burned at the stake by Roman Catholic Mary I of England after being persuaded to recant his protestant beliefs. Because of his betrayal of the truth, he offered his right hand to the flames first as he cried out, “This hand has offended, this unworthy right hand.”

[←63]

A sudden loss of consciousness when the flow of blood to the brain is stopped.

[←64]

The waters of bitterness. See Ex. 15:23-24.

[←65]
Rom 6.1

[←66]
Luk 18.13

[←67]
Job 20.12-14

[←68]

The diary of Samuel Pepys contains this for Feb 27, 1662: “It seems one Dillon, of a great family, after much endeavour to save him, was hanged with a silken halter this Sessions (of his own preparing).”

[←69]

"Deceit is conducted among the pleasures of the night."From Virgil's *Aeneid, Decent to the Underworld*; VI.126

[←70]
Jdg 14.8

[←71]

"There is a certain pleasure in crying" – Ovid, *Tristia*, iv. 3, 27.

[←72]

Cordial: a rich, sweet drink; liqueur.

[←73]

"Livery" here means the garb of a servant.

[←74]

The weights placed on a commercial scale that assess the value of the commodity that is sold.

[←75]

Aesop's Fables, “The Farmer and the Viper.”

[←76]

Francis Spira. See footnote on page 27 above.

[←77]

Augustine, *Confessions*, c. 397.

[←78]

James 1.15

[←79]

A tale from *Oedipus Rex*, written by Euripedes, the Greek playwright.

[←80]

The Great Plague (1665–1666) was an outbreak of the bubonic plague that killed an estimated 100,000 people in London.

[←81]

The Great Fire of London, September 2, 1666, destroying 80% of the city and 89 churches.

[←82]
Num 20.11