

TRACTS
OF THE
AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

General Series.



VOL. V.

PRINTED BY THE
AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,
150 NASSAU-STREET, NEW YORK.

ON REPENTANCE.

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WHILE many truths of religion are difficult to be understood, and liable to be mistaken, the plan of salvation and the way of acceptance, the doctrines necessary to be believed, and the duties requisite to be done, are clearly revealed. Who need be so ignorant as not to know that repentance is an immediate duty? It is the burden of every prophet's message; it is the theme of every teacher's instruction; it is the lesson taught by the threatenings of the law; it is the duty enforced by the whole spirit of the Gospel. The voice of him who cried in the wilderness, said, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." When the blessed Redeemer began to preach, it was, "Repent ye, and believe the Gospel." The apostles, as soon as commissioned by our Lord, "went out and preached that men should repent." Peter's message to the Jews was, "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out;" and Paul's testimony to the Gentiles was, that "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent." The calls of God's providence, and the influences of his Holy Spirit, whisper, "Repent ye;" and this little Tract, reader, sent with God's commission to your heart, charges you, as you value your soul, to repent.

Let me show you, that the duty is not so strongly insisted upon without the best reason.

The NECESSITY of repentance appears from the fact, *that all have sinned*. There is not a human being who does not come under the implication of guilt. It matters not that you be sober, industrious, moral, amiable, and respected; if you have ever for one moment loved the Lord your God with less than your whole heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, then you are a sinner in the sight of the great God. I take your guilt for granted, before proceeding one step further. The command to repent implies your guilt.

An angel of light is never commanded to repent, because an angel of light has never committed sin. Now, so surely as you have sinned, so surely must you repent, or abide the consequences. That these consequences are just and reasonable, is the sentence of both our own consciences and our Judge. *Our own consciences* acquiesce in the condemnation of the impenitent sinner. The law is holy in its nature, just in its requisitions, and good in its tendencies. The sinner broke it freely, and inexcusably; and if he will not repent, it is but right he should perish. The same sentence is pronounced by the mouth of *our Judge*: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." "*Cursed* is every one who *continueth not in all things* written in the book of the law to do them." "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Oh, "consider this, you that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver."

Repentance is necessary, because *inseparably connected with a cordial acceptance of the Gospel*.

The Gospel comes with the offer of pardon to the guilty, and life to the dead in trespasses and sins; but the unconvinced, unhumiliated sinner, feeling no heinous guilt, welcomes no pardon; and, insensible of his spiritual death, desires no spiritual life. The offer of mercy seems to him like the officiousness of a physician who urges his medicines upon the well; or like the insulting pittance of charity tendered to the rich. The Gospel is really no *Gospel* to him; its report is not *glad tidings*: on the contrary, he is offended with its humbling proposals, and revolts at its holy requisitions. What! shall he confess that he is poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked, when he feels that he is rich, and increased in goods, and has need of nothing? What! as an undone sinner, shall he rely on the merits of a crucified Saviour, when he believes his heart is at bottom sound, his works in the main righteous, his prayers on the whole acceptable, and God too merciful to damn so good a person as he? Reader, if these are your views, the gate of salvation by faith in Christ is entirely too narrow for you.

Repentance is necessary, because without it a sinner can *never be fit for the kingdom of God*, even supposing he gained admission there. He can never, with the multitude

which no man can number, ascribe salvation unto the Lamb. For, having never felt himself lost, he can never feel the grateful joy of a rescue. Having never cordially acknowledged his sin, or believed in Christ, he must still impute to God a want of wisdom in framing, a want of goodness in giving, and a want of faithfulness to himself, in not immediately executing his law. Claiming heaven as his right, he must think God unjust for casting down to hell innumerable sinners no worse than he. The contradictions are endless, which the salvation of an impenitent man involves. The salvation of an impenitent man! No, it can never take place. It is forbidden by the sinner's own nature, the glory of God, the reason of the case, the terms of salvation, and the sentence of the Judge of all.

Supposing you convinced of the necessity of repentance, let me call your attention to the NATURE of the duty.

Repentance is that *abhorrence of sin*, and *that sorrow on its account, which leads a man to FORSAKE it*. The Scriptures have nowhere laid down a standard by which the pungency of penitential sorrow must be measured. It differs in individuals, and it varies in the same individual. My design is not to point out the *degree*, but the *nature* of repentance. It is sorrow for *sin*; which is quite distinct from a sorrow for the *consequences* of sin. There are those who, alarmed by their exposure to punishment, express the deepest regret for sin, who are no sooner relieved from their fears, than they relapse into their former ungodliness. "When he slew them, then they sought him; and they returned and inquired early after God. Nevertheless, they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant." Psalm 78: 34-37. Such spurious sorrow, it is to be feared, is exercised by most who repent upon their death-bed.

We have an impressive specimen of the language of true repentance in the fifty-first-Psalm: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." The penitent man will breathe out his soul in lowly confession of his iniquity; in self-abasement, and acknowledgment of God's justice in his condemnation. And

he will, at the same time, *turn* from his evil way. He will seek to repair the injuries he may have done his fellow-men. He who approaches God with the gains of dishonesty in his hands, may be assured that he is a hypocrite. He that, under the pretext of law, deprives his creditors of their due, and beholds them suffering by his former extravagance or fraud, and makes no restitution from his present abundance, has no evidence that he has repented of that extravagance or fraud. He that continues to overreach his neighbor in a bargain, or sells his goods for better than they are, or continues, knowingly, to deal in contraband or smuggled commodities, can have no just pretensions to sincerity in his religion.

While the penitent deploras before God the pernicious principles he may have formerly held, he will be concerned to *reclaim those who have been injured by his influence*; though, to his regret, he will often find, that he has sown seeds which he can never eradicate, and done a mischief he can never repair.

Repentance will lead to a *firm determination to be holy in future*. Reformation is, after all, the only test of genuine repentance. It matters not how much men may feel, if this be wanting. There may be the terror of Cain, the sorrow and restitution of Judas, the fair promises of Pharaoh, the humiliation of Ahab, the readiness of Herod in hearing gladly and doing many things, the joy of the stony-ground hearers; there may be the tongues of angels, the gift of prophecy, and the knowledge of all mysteries; but if *reformation* be wanting, it is all in vain. The difference between the sorrow of the world, which worketh death, and godly sorrow, is, that the one leaves a man to continue in known sin, while the other leads him without delay to forsake it. He that stole must steal no more; he that was fraudulent, must not only make restitution, but must be thenceforth honest. The tongue that was dipped in the poison of asps, must be regulated by the law of kindness; the profane must reverence the thrice-holy name of God; the liar observe the strictest verity; the Sabbath-breaker must hallow God's appropriated day; the drunkard must forsake his cups, and the gambler abandon his cards, or there is no evidence, however pungent were his convictions, or deep his regret, that he is a genuine penitent.

It is true, that he who has sincerely repented will be afterwards followed by his besetting sin; but though it may perplex him, and sometimes overcome him, it will not reign in him, nor be indulged by him.

It is proper to observe, that genuine repentance towards God is never separated from faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. The convinced sinner can find no peace of conscience but in the cross of Christ; and a sight of him whom he has pierced will increase his mourning for sin. Hence, a penitent unbeliever, or an impenitent believer, are characters nowhere to be found.

The nature of repentance being explained, let me next mention some ENCOURAGEMENTS to this duty.

And first observe, that *God commands it*. Were a king to send a message to some rebellious subjects, requiring them to repent, it would surely be regarded as a favorable indication; for he who intends no mercy, requires no submission. If no other intelligence had ever come from heaven to our guilty race, but the command, "Repent ye," it should light up a beam of hope, and lead us to conclude that God had thoughts of peace and purposes of mercy towards the relenting.

But we have many most precious *promises* made to the penitent. "Thus saith the high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite heart, and that trembleth at my word." "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but he that confesseth and forsaketh his sins, shall find mercy." Prov. 28: 13. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; but if we *confess*," that is, acknowledge and forsake, "our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John, 1: 9. If, after promises so encouraging, the vilest should despair, let him consider the case of other returning sinners. Let him remember David, who, after the black crimes of adultery and murder, was pardoned. Let him think of Manasseh, who, having caused the streets of Jerusalem to run

down with innocent blood, in his old age sought mercy, and found it; of Peter, who denied his Lord thrice, even with cursing, and yet, when he repented, was forgiven; of Saul of Tarsus, who made havoc of the church, and persecuted the saints unto death, with a desperate malice, yet upon repentance was forgiven, and became the chiefest of the apostles. Let him look upon our Saviour's striking delineation of every penitent, in the parable of the prodigal son. When he came to himself, like a poor sinner when he begins for the first time to reflect on his ways, he thought of his father's house and the plenty there. He resolved to go, and try whether, after much humiliation, he might be admitted among the hired servants. He goes, with many a bitter reflection on his folly, with many an anxious and desponding fear about his reception. He draws nigh the home he had deserted, afraid to approach. His father sees him afar off. His heart is moved within him. He runs, he falls upon his neck, and kisses him. "Father," cries the weeping penitent, "I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." But the father said unto the servants, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." Oh, prodigal son! impenitent sinner! whosoever thou art, who hast wandered far from thy Father's house, and art starving in sin, you have only to go back, in humble acknowledgments, and you shall have a gracious reception.

It remains to point out the PROPER TIME for repentance. Your duty is plain, and the direction short: "Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation." "*To-day*, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart." But the main obstacle is yet to be overcome—your repugnance to the duty. Nothing effectual will be accomplished, unless you can be persuaded to repent without delay. And yet no impenitent sinner will ever cast his eyes upon these pages, who has not been repeatedly exhorted to this duty. Why then should I hope that this friendly warning will not be treated like that of Lot, who seemed as one that mocked to his sons-in-law? If it were by human might or power,

the friends of Jesus might sit down in despair ; but it is by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts.

Reader, while you are looking upon this page, God is looking upon your heart. Perhaps his Holy Spirit, whom you have so long resisted, is now for the last time striving to bring you to repentance. Should you stifle your present convictions, resolve upon a more convenient season, and venture your eternity upon the never-coming morrow, you may be given up to hardness of heart, and be henceforth deserted of the Spirit of God. Should this be the case, then it would have been better for you if you never had been born.

Again, consider that delay only *rivets the bondage of sin, and increases the difficulty* of repentance. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are *accustomed* to do evil.”

Consider, also, that the *terms of salvation will never be easier* than they now are. Were you to live a thousand years, God would not lower the requisitions of his Gospel one jot or tittle. He will still require repentance. He will still demand faith.

There are few unconverted men who do not intend at some time to repent. But when will you execute your intention? “When I become somewhat older,” says one; “I am too young to think of serious things.” You, my young friend, are the very person who ought to think of them. As for the old, there is little hope of them; but now, while your hearts are tender, and your habits unformed, it will be comparatively easy. They that seek God early, shall find him; and they that find him, will never regret it. None who read this are too young to repent. If you are not too young to sin, and too young to die, you are not too young to repent. “I will repent,” says another, “when I shall have acquired a competency, and become more abstracted from the necessary cares and business of the world.” Reflect a moment, before you make so dangerous an experiment. Consider whether the world is not likely to have the same influence on you, that it has upon all others; whether this whirlpool, growing more rapid the nearer you approach it, will not finally engulf you beyond recovery. Consider, as you love your own soul, whether, even supposing you should be spared and prospered as

much as you desire, you will be in a state of mind more favorable to repentance than now. No, you will not; and I warn you against the hazard you deliberately run.

The thoughts of the heart of another are, "If I repent now, I must renounce all pleasures, and live a life of religious gloom, the very idea of which I cannot bear. God will have mercy on me, if I repent at my last hour; and thus I shall escape the penance, and get the blessing too." Let me tell you, sinner, whosoever you be, that you are under the delusion of the devil. And is a life of piety, then, a life of irksome gloom? Bear witness with me, all ye that have ever tasted that the Lord is gracious, if this is not an utter misapprehension. And so you intend, after you have spent the best of your life in the service of Satan, to give a miserable remnant to God! And are you perfectly sure that you will repent at the last hour? Do you not know that there is a time, when you may call, and God will not answer; when you may stretch forth your hands, and he will not regard? What evidence will you then have that your repentance is sincere? Is it not plain, that the only additional motive which you can then have, will be the fear of punishment? And is it not clear, that such a repentance will be a mere forced submission? Are you sure you will have an opportunity to repent at your dying hour? Many lose their lives suddenly, without any warning; many become immediately delirious; many are so racked with pain, and stupefied by medicine, that it is impossible for them to command their thoughts, or make any preparation for eternity. Assuredly a dying hour is not the proper time for repentance. "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked" *now* "forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."