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THE

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**VOL. X.**

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“And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.”—Rev. 14 : 6.

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## MARKS OF TRUE REPENTANCE.

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BY REV. JONATHAN DICKINSON,  
FIRST PRESIDENT OF PRINCETON COLLEGE.

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You ask the distinction between a *legal* and an *evangelical* repentance. To give a clear view of the subject, I will first name some particulars wherein the distinction does *not* consist.

A deep *distress* of mind on account of *sinning against God*, is common both to legal and evangelical repentance. Even Judas could cry out with agony of soul, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood;" as well as the Psalmist groan out his complaint, that there was "no rest in his bones because of his sins."

A *fearful apprehension of the divine displeasure* may be common to both sorts of penitents. Mere legal convictions may make "sinners in Zion afraid, and fearfulness surprise the hypocrite;" and "destruction from God may be a terror" to a holy Job, in as great reality, though not with such despairing infidelity, as to a Cain or Judas.

*Dread of outward and known courses of sinning*, and a temporary *reformation* from them, may likewise be the consequence of both a legal and evangelical repentance. Ahab humbled himself, lay in sackcloth, and went softly; and Herod reformed many things, as well as David "refrained his feet from every evil way." It is impossible for a sinner to give the reins to his lusts while under the lashes of an awakened conscience; a mere legal conviction must, while it lasts, produce an external reformation.

Men may be brought to *diligence and activity in external duty*, by both a legal and evangelical repentance. An insincere repentance may bring men, with the hypocritical Jews, to "seek the Lord daily;" as true repentance always brings men "to lift up their hearts and their hands to God in the heavens."

A comforting persuasion of having obtained pardoning mercy is common to both kinds of penitents. God's ancient people, when most incorrigible in their impiety, would "trust in lying words, come and stand before him in the house that was called by his name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations." The Israelites in the wilderness concluded that "God was their rock, and the most high God their Redeemer, when they flattered him with their lips, and lied to him with their tongues, and their hearts were not right with him." And on the other hand, the true penitent may say with David, "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest me the iniquity of my sins."

In short, it is not the deepest sense of sin or guilt, nor the most distressing sorrow on that account; it is not the fear of God's wrath, nor the greatest external reformation of life; it is not the most diligent external attendance upon duty, nor the most quieting persuasion of having made our peace with God; nor all these together, that will prove a man sincerely penitent: for all these may be, and have been, attained to by mere hypocrites; and often are found with the false as well as the true professor.

Having, by way of precaution, made these remarks, I now proceed directly to consider the *distinction between LEGAL AND EVANGELICAL REPENTANCE.*

1. A *legal repentance* flows only from a *sense of danger* and fear of *wrath*; but *evangelical repentance* is a true mourning for *sin*, and earnest desire of *deliverance* from it.

When the conscience of a sinner is alarmed with a sense of his dreadful guilt and danger, it must necessarily remonstrate against those impieties which threaten him with ruin. Hence those frights and terrors which we so commonly see in awakened sinners. Their sins (especially some grosser enormities of their lives) stare them in the face, with their peculiar aggravations. They are brought upon their knees before God to acknowledge their sins, and to cry for mercy; and now conscience, like a flaming sword, perhaps keeps them from their former course of impiety. And what is all this repentance, but mere terror and fear of hell? It is true, the law sometimes proves a schoolmaster to drive sinners to Christ; and conviction of sin, and a legal repentance, are a necessary preparative to a saving conversion; but these

alone give no claim to the promise of the Gospel. The house may be thus empty, swept, and garnished, but for the reception of seven worse spirits than were driven out of it; and a sinner may thus "escape the pollutions of the world," and yet have "his latter end worse than the beginning."

If, on the other hand, we consider the character of a sincere *gospel-repentance*, though such legal terrors may lead to its exercise, they do not belong to its nature; nor are they any part of it. *Sin itself* becomes the greatest burden and aversion to a truly penitent soul. "I hate" says the Psalmist, "every false way." "O wretched man that I am," says the apostle, "who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" Thus the penitent groans, being burdened; not for fear of hell, such fear being no part of true repentance, though it may sometimes accompany it; but from an affecting, humbling *sense of sin*. His language is, "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Mine iniquities are gone over mine head as a heavy burden; they are too heavy for me. Deliver me from all my transgressions. Let not my sins have dominion over me. Innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me. Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me: O Lord, make haste to help me." As the true penitent longs for more and more victory over his corruptions, so is he most watchful, prayerful, and in earnest to mortify his lusts, and to cut off all supplies of sin. There is nothing so grievous to him as sin, and nothing which he so earnestly desires as a nearer approach to that blessed state, where "nothing can enter which defileth or worketh abomination."

Here you see the difference between being driven from a course of sinning by the lashes of an awakened conscience, and loathing ourselves in our own sight, for all our iniquities and abominations. The former is merely the fruit of self-love, which prompts the soul to fly from danger: the latter is the exercise of a vital principle, which separates the soul from sin, and engages the whole man in a continued opposition to it.

2. A *legal* repentance flows from *unbelief*; but an *evangelical* repentance is the *fruit of saving faith*.

I have shown that a legal repentance is effected by fear.

ful apprehensions of hell. And whence this fear and terror? Has not the Gospel provided a glorious relief for such distresses, and opened a blessed door of hope for the greatest sinners? Is not pardon and salvation freely offered to all that will accept a blessed Savior and his saving benefits? Is not the blood of Christ sufficient to cleanse from all sin, however aggravated? Why then do they not cheerfully fly for refuge to this hope set before them? Alas, they can see no safety in it! The law of God condemns their disobedience; conscience joins it, and hence their only refuge is resolutions, reformations, duties, penance, or some such self-righteous methods, to pacify God's justice and quiet conscience. The defect of their endeavors and attainments creates new terrors; their terrors excite new endeavors; and thus they go on, without "attaining to the law of righteousness, because they seek it not of faith, but as it were by the works of the law." They may, it is true, have some respect to Christ, in this their legal progress. They may hope that God will accept them for Christ's sake. They may use his name in their prayers for pardon, while they dare not depend upon the merits of his blood for the remission of their sins and a freedom from condemnation. And what is all this but a secret hope that the redemption of Christ will add such merit to their frights and fears, reformations and duties, as to make them atone for their sins, and purchase the favor of God? So that all their penitential appearances are nothing but the workings of unbelief.

*The true penitent* approaches God's presence with a deep impression of *his guilt and unworthiness*, and of his just desert of an eternal rejection from God. But then he comes before a mercy-seat. Though he is forced to acknowledge that if God should mark iniquity he could not stand before him; he yet remembers that "with God there is forgiveness that he may be feared;" and "that with him there is plenteous redemption." He looks to the blood of Christ as what alone can cleanse away his numerous and aggravated sins, and from thence he takes encouragement to mourn out the Psalmist's language, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than the snow." This is the prospect which both encourages and invigorates his cries for mercy, and imbitters his

sins to him; and which makes him loathe them all, and long for deliverance from them all. "Is God infinitely merciful and ready to forgive, (says the penitent soul,) and have I been so basely ungrateful as to sin against such astonishing goodness, to affront and abuse such mercy and love! Is sin so hateful to God, that his own dear Son must die? How vile, how polluted and abominable must I then appear in the eyes of his holiness and justice, that am nothing but defilement and guilt, from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet—nothing but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores! Has the blessed Savior suffered his Father's wrath for my sins? Have they nailed him to the cross, and brought him under the agonies of an accursed death; and shall I be  
 er reconciled to my lusts any more, and go on to crucify the Son of God afresh? May I obtain strength from the Lord Jesus Christ for victory over my corruptions; and shall I not both resolve in his strength against them, and lie at his feet, that 'the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus may make me free from the law of sin and death?' Have I dishonored God so much already, loaded my precious Savior with so many indignities, and brought such a weight of guilt upon myself; and is it not now high time to bid an utter defiance to my most darling lusts, the greatest enemies to God and my own soul?" Such is the language of a gospel-repentance.

You cannot but see the great distinction, and even contrariety, between a guilty flight of soul *from* God, like Adam after his fall, and an humbling, self-condemning flight *to* God's pardoning mercy, like the *prodigal*, when returning to his Father's house; between legal, slavish, self-righteous endeavors to atone for our sins and make our peace with God, and repairing only to the blood of Christ for cleansing from all sin; between mourning for our guilt and danger, and mourning for our sins, as they are against God, against a precious Savior, against infinite mercy and love; and, in a word, between attempting a new life by the strength of our own resolutions and endeavors, and looking only to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for grace and strength, as well as pardon and freedom from condemnation.

3. A *legal* repentance flows from an *aversion to God and his holy law*; but *evangelical* repentance from *love to both*.

The distress, the terror and amazement that awakened sinners are under, arise from their dreadful apprehensions of God and his terrible justice. They know they have greatly provoked him, and are afraid of his wrath; and therefore want some covert, where they may hide themselves from his presence. They might before, perhaps, have some pleasing apprehensions of God, while they considered him as being all mercy without justice; and while they could hope for pardon, and yet live in their sins. But, now they have some sense of his holiness and justice, he appears an infinite enemy, and therefore most terrible to their souls. They are consulting, indeed, some way to be at peace with him, because they are afraid the controversy will issue in their destruction. They resolve upon new obedience, from the same motives that slaves obey their severe tyrannical masters; while the rule of their obedience is directly contrary to the bent, bias, and disposition of their souls. Were the penalty of the law taken away, their aversion to it would quickly appear, and they would soon embrace their beloved lusts with the same pleasure and delight as formerly. This is frequently exemplified in those who wear off their convictions and reformations together, and notwithstanding all their former religious appearances, discover the alienation of their hearts to God and his law by their sinful lives; and, as the apostle expresses it, show themselves "enemies in their minds, by wicked works."

But, on the contrary, the sincere *gospel-penitent* sees an admirable beauty and excellency in a *life of holiness*, and therefore groans after higher attainments in it. He is sensible how much he has transgressed the law of God, how very far he is departed from the purity and holiness of the divine nature. This is the burden of his soul. Hence it is that he often walks in heaviness, and waters his couch with tears. He mourns, not because the law is so strict, or the penalty so severe; for he esteems "the law to be holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good." But he mourns, that though "the law be spiritual," he is "carnal, sold under sin." He mourns that his nature is so contrary to God; that his practice is so contrary to his will; and that he can make no better progress in mortifying the deeds of the flesh, in regulating his affections, appetites, and passions, and in living to God. He breathes with the same earnestness after

sanctification, as after freedom from wrath. He does not want to have the law bend to his corruptions, but to have his heart and life fully subjected to the law and will of God. There is nothing he so much desires as freedom from sin, proficiency in faith and holiness, and a life of fellowship with God. "O," says the penitent believer, "what a wicked heart have I, that is so estranged from the holy nature of God, and from his righteous law! What a guilty wretch have I been, who have walked so contrary to the glorious God, have trampled upon his excellent perfections, violated his holy law, and made so near an approach even to the nature of the devil! O for the cleansing efficacy of the blood of Christ, and the renewing influences of his Holy Spirit, to purify this sink of pollution, and to sanctify these depraved affections of my soul! Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!" Let me be a partaker of the divine nature, and be brought near to God, whatever else be denied me! "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" Such are the aspirations of sincere repentance.

Thus the legal penitent looks upon God with dread, terror, and aversion of soul—the evangelical penitent mourns his distance from him, and longs to be more transformed into his image. The one still loves his sins, in his heart, though he mourns that there is a law to punish them—the other hates all his sins without reserve, and groans under the burden of them, because they are contrary to God and his holy law. The obedience of the one is by mere constraint—the imperfections of the other are matter of continual grief; and he is constantly longing and striving after greater degrees of grace and holiness. The one can find no inward and abiding complacency in the service of God—the other runs in the way of his commandments with delight, and takes more pleasure in obedience than in any thing else.

4. A legal repentance ordinarily flows from *discouragement and despondency*; but an *evangelical* repentance is accompanied with a *confiding trust in God's mercy*.

I have already considered how a legal repentance is excited and maintained by terrors of conscience and fearful apprehensions of the wrath of God. Some indeed, by their external reformations, pacify conscience, and cry peace to their souls; but while their concern continues, their desponding fears are the very life of it. They are afraid that God

will never pardon and accept such rebels as they have been; and though they dare not neglect duty, they come with horror into the presence of God, as to an inexorable judge; and have nothing to keep their souls from sinking into despair but their good designs and endeavors, which yet are too defective to give them comfortable hope. And what is all this but a most ungrateful undervaluing the blood of Christ, limiting the goodness and mercy of God, and an implicit denying the truth of the whole Gospel of God our Savior?

On the other hand, though the true *gospel-penitent* may have a deeper impression of the greatness of his guilt than even the awakened, terrified legalist himself, yet he dare not despair of God's mercy. A fear and jealousy of our own sincerity may be consistent with true repentance, and perhaps sometimes serve to further its progress; yet all doubts of the faithfulness of the gospel promises, of the extensiveness of the divine mercy, and fears of our exclusion from the gospel offer; all apprehensions of our not being elected; of our having sinned away the day of grace, or sinned against the Holy Ghost; and a! imaginations that our sins are so circumstanced as not to admit of pardoning mercy, are inconsistent with the actings of a true repentance. A sincere penitent looks over the highest mountains which are raised before him by the greatness of his sins, his own mis-giving heart, or the temptations of Satan, into an ocean of infinite goodness and mercy. Thither he will fly, and there he will hope, let his case appear ever so dark, and though every thing seems to make against him. And the more lively and comfortable his hope is, the more he is humbled and abased for his sins, and the more vigorous are his endeavors after a life of new obedience.

"I confess," says the truly penitent soul, "that my sins are like the stars of the firmament, and like the sand on the sea-shore, for multitude; that they are of a scarlet and crimson dye; and that it is of the infinite patience of God that such a guilty wretch is out of hell. But yet, great and dreadfully aggravated as are my sins, the merit of a Redeemer's blood is sufficient to atone for them all; and infinite mercy is still greater than my greatest sins. I will therefore cast my guilty soul at the footstool of a sovereign God, and rely on infinite mercy through a Redeemer. I will depend upon the blood of Christ, which cleanseth from all sin. O how

will mercy triumph over such sins as mine! How great glory will God bring to the riches of his infinite grace in the salvation of such a sinner as I, if ever I am saved! How will heaven ring with eternal alleluias on my account! Surely I have sinned enough already. Let me no more add to the number and guilt of my sins, by distrust of God's mercy, or by doubting the sincerity of his invitations.

5. A *legal* repentance is *temporary*, wearing off with the convictions of conscience which occasion it; but an *evangelical* repentance is the *daily exercise* of the true Christian.

We have sad and numerous instances of those who, for a while, appear under the greatest remorse for sin, and yet quickly wear off all their impressions, and return to the same course of impiety which occasioned their distress and terror; and thereby declare to the world that their goodness, like Ephraim's, was but as "a morning cloud and the early dew." And beside these, there seem to be some who quiet conscience and speak peace to their souls, from their having been in distress and terror for their sins, from their reformation of some grosser immoralities, and from a formal course of duty. They have repented, they think, and therefore conclude themselves at peace with God, and seem to have no great care or concern about either their former impieties or their daily transgressions. They conclude themselves in a converted state, and are therefore easy, careless, and secure. These may think, and perhaps speak, loftily of their experiences; they may be blown up with joyful apprehensions of their safe state, but have no impressions of their sins, no mourning after pardon, no groaning under the burden of a wicked heart, imperfect duties, and renewed provocations against God. They perform their duties in a careless manner, with a trifling, remiss frame of soul, while the great concerns of an unseen, eternal world, are but little in their minds; and all their religion is a mere cold formality. They maintain the form, but are unconcerned about the power of godliness.

On the other hand, a saving *evangelical* repentance involves a *continual self-abasement and abhorrence of all sin*, both in the heart and life. The true penitent does not forget his past sins, and grow careless and unconcerned about them, as soon as he obtains peace in his conscience, and a comforting hope that he is reconciled to God: but the clearer

evidences he obtains of the divine favor, the more does he loathe, abhor, and condemn himself for sin; the more vile does he seem in his own eyes, and the more aggravated and enormous do his past sins appear. A sense of pardoning mercy makes Paul appear to himself "the chief of sinners," and speak of himself as a pattern of hope to all that shall come after him. The true penitent not only continues to abhor himself on account of his past guilt and defilement, but finds daily cause to renew his repentance before God. He finds so much deadness, formality, and hypocrisy in his duties, so much carnality, worldly-mindedness, and unbelief in his heart, so much prevalence of his sinful affections, appetites and passions, and so many foils by the sin that easily besets him, that he cannot but "groan, being burdened, while he is in this tabernacle." Repentance, therefore, is the daily continued exercise of the Christian. "Have I hope," says the penitent soul, "that God has pardoned my sins? What an instance of pardoning mercy is this! How adorable is that wonderful grace, which has plucked such a brand out of the fire! And am I still daily offending against such mercy and love? Am I yet doing so little for him, who has done so much for me? Ah, vile, sinful heart! Ah, base ingratitude to such amazing goodness! O for more victory over my corruptions; for more thankfulness for such mercies; for more spirituality and heavenly-mindedness! What need have I, every day, to have this polluted soul washed in the blood of Christ, and to repair to the glorious Advocate with the Father for the benefit of his intercession! Not a step can I take in my spiritual progress without fresh supplies from the fountain of grace and strength; and yet how often am I provoking him to withdraw his influences, in whom is all my hope and confidence! 'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death!'" Thus the true penitent "goes with his face Zion-ward, mourning as he goes." And thus in his highest attainments of comfort and joy will he find cause to be deeply humbled before God, and to wrestle with him for renewed pardon, and new supplies of strengthening and quickening grace.

The difference between these two sorts of penitents is like that between the running of water in the paths after a shower, and the streams flowing from a living fountain: a legal repentance lasting no longer than the terrors which occasion

it, but an evangelical repentance being a continued war with sin.

6. A *legal* repentance does at most produce only a *partial and external reformation*; but an *evangelical* repentance is a total change of *heart and life*, a *universal* turning from sin to God.

As some of the more gross iniquities most commonly lead the way to that distress and terror which is the life of a legal and insincere repentance; so a reformation of those sins too frequently wears off the impression, and gives peace and rest to the troubled conscience, without any further change. Or, at best, there will be some darling lusts retained, some right hand or right eye spared, some sweet morsel rolled under the tongue. If the legal penitent be afraid of the sins of commission, he may still live in the omission or the careless performance of known duty. Or if he be more forward in the duties of God's immediate worship, he may still live in acts of injustice, strife, and uncharitableness toward men. If he shows some zeal and activity in the service of God, he will yet, perhaps, have his heart and affections inordinately attached to the world, and pursue it as the object of his chief desire and delight. If he avoids all open sins, he yet little regards the sins of his heart, but lives in envy, malice, pride, carnality, unbelief, or some other such heart-defiling sin. To finish his character, whatever seeming progress he may make in religion, his *heart* is "not right with God," but is still going after his idols, still estranged from the power of godliness."

The character of the *sincere penitent* is directly contrary to this. He finds indeed continued occasion to lament the great imperfections of his heart and life, and accordingly seeks renewed pardon and cleansing in the blood of Christ. But though he has "not already attained, nor is already perfect," he is "pressing toward perfection." He is watching, striving against all his corruptions; aiming at and endeavoring after further conformity to God, in all holy conversation and godliness. He is never satisfied with a partial reformation, with external duty, or with any thing short of a life of vital piety. He does not renounce one lust and retain another; content himself with the duties of the first table of the law and neglect those of the second; nor quiet himself in a life of mere formal godliness; nor can he rest

till he "rejoices in the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he has his conversation in the world." All the actings of his mind, as well as his external conduct, fall under his strictest inspection, and he is ever earnest to approve himself to Him who "knows his thoughts afar off." His reformation extends not only to the devotions of the church, but of his family and his closet; not only to his conversation, but to his thoughts and affections; not only to the worship of God, but to the duties of every relation he sustains among men; and in a word, his repentance produces heavenly-mindedness, humility, meekness, charity, patience, forgiving of injuries, self-denial; and is accompanied with all other fruits and graces of the blessed Spirit. "It is the desire of my soul," says the sincere penitent, "to keep the way of the Lord, and never depart from my God. I would refrain my feet from every evil way, and walk within my house with a perfect heart. I know I have to do with a God who trieth the heart; I would therefore set the Lord always before me, and serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind."

A legal repentance is an external reformation only, destitute of all the graces of the blessed Spirit. True repentance is a change of the heart, of the will and affections, as well as of the outward conversation; a change which is accompanied with all the fruits and graces of the Spirit of God. The one aims at just so much religion as will keep the mind easy, and calm the ruffles of an awakened conscience: the other aims at a holy, humble, watchful, and spiritual walk with God, and rests in no degree of attainments whatsoever.

READER, I have thus laid before you some of the distinguishing marks of true repentance—not to gratify curiosity, or as a subject of useless speculation—but that, renouncing all sin, and casting yourself on the mercy of Christ, you may, through the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, *exercise and practise that repentance which is "unto life, not to be repented of."*

END.