

The Doctrine of Repenance

by E.C. Wines

Repentance is a change wrought in the mind and intention by a retrospect of our past life, resulting in a change of apprehension, feeling, purpose, and life, and is urgent because it is a Divine command.

Scripture: Psalm 51:17, Proverbs 28:13, Jeremiah 13:23, Ezekiel 18:30, Matthew 3:8, Luke 15:7, Acts 17:30, 2 Corinthians 7:10, Hebrews 10:31, 2 Peter 3:9

Topics: "True Repentance", "Faith And Obedience"

Description

E.C. Wines preaches on the duty of repentance, emphasizing the profound nature of true repentance that involves a change in the mind, heart, and actions of individuals. He distinguishes between false and true repentance, highlighting the importance of sorrow for sin and faith in God's mercy. Repentance is described as a four-fold change: of apprehension, feeling, purpose, and life, leading to obedience as the crown of repentance.

Transcript

God commandeth all men everywhere to repent. (Acts 17:30)

THE DUTY OF REPENTANCE

General Nature of Repentance

The word repentance, in the original language of the New Testament, signifies an after-thought. It denotes a change wrought in the mind and intention by a retrospect of our past life. This change begins in the intellect, the seat of knowledge. It pre-supposes a right apprehension of God, of ourselves, of the deep corruption of our nature, of the heinousness and hatefulness of sin, and of our need of pardon and cleansing through the blood of Christ. The eyes of the understanding are opened to see the evil of sin, as it is opposed to the spotless purity of God; and the danger of sin, as it is calculated to arm his justice against us; and also to see how sin has pervaded the whole man; how it has dishonoured every part of the Divine law; and how Jehovah himself regards it.

But, though repentance begins in the understanding, where it must have a foundation of knowledge, it does not end there. It extends to all the faculties of the soul, -- the conscience, the affections, the will, and the active powers. When God, in Christ, is presented in all his attractive beauties to the divinely-enlightened mind, the heart springs forward to embrace him with desire, love, and gratitude such

as it never felt towards any other object. "I will arise and go to my FATHER," is the instinctive thought of the true penitent; "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" is the spontaneous and irrepressible emotion of his soul. When sin is viewed, by a mind so illuminated, as committed against a God of infinite love and purity, as breaking each most sacred tie, and as trampling upon every obligation which binds man to his Creator, Benefactor, Redeemer, Sanctifier, and Judge, the heart, smitten by this sight, pours forth floods of penitential sorrow. The whole soul is melted down, and gives vent to its emotions in the unaffected language of grief and self-abhorrence. Job and Jeremiah have given utterance to its penitential exercises in fitting words: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." "I lie down in my shame, and my confusion covereth me; for I have sinned against the Lord my God."

False and True Repentance Distinguished

There is a repentance called by St. Paul "the sorrow of the world which worketh death." The grief in which it consists may be pungent and bitter; but it springs from no gospel principles, entertains no gospel aims, and is controlled by no gospel motives. It is but another name for remorse of conscience. It is a slavish terror of Divine wrath. It proceeds from horror of the judgment-seat. It dreads the award of distributive justice. It fears God, not as a Father, but as a Judge, ready to pour out the vials of his indignation. Escape from hell is its only anxiety. The pure joys and holy employments of heaven have no attractions for the soul which knows only this legal or natural repentance. This sort of repentance may be produced by the mere principles of unrenewed nature, without the supernatural and regenerating influence of the Divine Spirit.

Not such is that "godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto life." This springs from a just sight and sense of sin, and from faith in the Divine mercy through a Redeemer. It is sorrow for sin as committed against God, and as contrary to his holy nature and law. It is a fruit of the Spirit; a saving grace; a precious effect of covenant mercy; and a bright evidence of the new heart. Among Christian graces, it is second in importance to faith only. Though posterior to faith in the order of nature, it is simultaneous with it in its acts; and the two are inseparable. An impenitent believer is such another contradiction in terms as a square circle. We might as fitly talk of a proud humility, or a sinful holiness, or a loving hatred, as of an unrepentant believer. Repentance springs into exercise at the moment when spiritual life is imparted, and evidences itself in the exercise of saving faith.

The Change Wrought In Repentance Four-fold

Repentance, as before observed, denotes a change of mind and intention, consequent upon a deliberate review of our past conduct. This change is four-fold: It is a change of apprehension; a change of feeling; a change of purpose, and a change of life.

Repentance is a Change of Apprehension

The eyes of the true penitent are opened to discern wondrous things out of the Divine law. A new and divine light shines upon the sacred page, and illumines the depths of his own soul. God, Christ, the Bible, sin, holiness, time, eternity, heaven, hell, and all other spiritual truths appear to him as they never appeared before. He has a new and delightful apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ. He has an intimate and cheering conviction that there is forgiveness with God, and plenteous redemption through a crucified Redeemer.

Repentance is a Change of Feeling

The apprehension of Divine mercy and forgiveness, noticed in the preceding paragraph as the first element in repentance, excites penitential grief, and makes tears of godly sorrow flow. True repentance, however, is not a superficial sigh. It is not a mere passing emotion, like the cloud that weeps a few drops in the morning, but disappears before the ascending sun. It is a pungent, bitter, lasting sorrow. It is a sorrow that hates the sin for which it weeps. It is a sorrow called, in Scripture, "a weeping sore," a "weeping with bitterness," a "rending of the heart," a "breaking of the spirit." David sorrowed thus when he mourned for his adultery and murder. Jeremiah sorrowed thus when his eyes became a fountain of tears over the sins of his nation. Peter sorrowed thus when he wept bitterly over his shameful denial of his Master. The expression of this sorrow will vary according to the age, sex, and temper of the subject of it. The repentance is not to be measured by the tears, but by the grief; and the grief not by the sensitive trouble, but by the hatred of sin; a hatred which must be universal and irreconcilable, extending to all sins, and to sin at all times.

Repentance is a Change of Purpose

With the true penitent, self is no longer the centre of his motives, nor the main scope of his actions. God has now become his centre and supreme good. The man's chief object is at length in harmony with his chief end: to glorify God and enjoy him for ever. Relying on the promised aid of the Holy Spirit, and the strength of Christ his Saviour, he resolves to break off his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities by turning unto the Lord. In true repentance, there is a deliberate and settled purpose of obedience to the Divine commands. Of this, David is an eminent example. After an humble confession of his sin, and a passionate entreaty for pardon and cleansing, conscious of the Divine forgiveness, he announces the pious resolution of a penitential heart: "I will teach transgressors thy ways;" "my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness;" and "my mouth shall show forth thy praise." (Ps. li. 13-15.) And again, in another place, but to the same purport, he says: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." (Ps. cxix. 59.)

Repentance is a Change of Life

Obedience is the crown and perfection of repentance. In this, true repentance mainly consists. This alone affords evidence of a genuine grief for sin, and a cordial hatred of it. There must be a turning from all sin in heart and life; a turning from all temptations to sin; a turning especially from easily-besetting sins; a resisting the outbreaks of sin; a watching against all occasions of sin. "True repentance," says quaint old Jeremy Taylor, "must reduce to act all its holy purposes, and enter into, and run through the state of holy living, which is contrary to that state of darkness in which, in time past, we walked. For to resolve to do it, and yet not to do it, is to break our resolution and our faith, to mock God, to falsify and evacuate all the acts of apparent repentance, and to make our pardon hopeless, and our hope fruitless. He that resolves to live well when a danger is upon him, or a violent fear, or when the appetites of lust are newly satisfied, or newly served, and yet, when the temptation comes again, sins again, and then is sorrowful, and resolves once more against it, and yet falls when the temptation returns, is a vain man, but no true penitent, nor in the state of grace; and if he chance to die in one of these good moods, is very far from salvation; for if it be necessary that we resolve to live well, it is necessary we should do so. For resolution is an imperfect act, a term of relation, and signifies nothing but in order to the actions. It is as a faculty to the act, as spring to the harvest, as eggs are to birds, as a relative to its correspondent, -- nothing without it. No man, therefore, can be in the state of grace and actual favour by resolutions and holy purposes; these are but the gate

and portal towards pardon; a holy life is the only perfection of repentance, and the firm ground upon which we can cast the anchor of hope in the mercies of God through Jesus Christ."

THE AUTHORITY WHICH ENJOINS

THE DUTY OF REPENTANCE

It is God who commands "all men, everywhere, to repent." Consider the greatness and majesty of the Being who has laid this duty of repentance upon us. He is the self-existent and infinite One, to whom belong all power, wisdom, knowledge, and dominion. It is he who said, "Let there be light, and there was light." He formed the earth by his power; he stretched out the heavens by his understanding; he governs all things by his wisdom. He upholds all things by the word of his power, preserving them the same amid perpetual change. All the works of men are subject to decay. Time sweeps away the proudest monuments of human greatness. Castles, palaces, temples, cities, and even the more ethereal and beautiful creations of genius are destroyed by its ruthless hand. But the sun shines with undiminished splendour; the earth renews her fertility from year to year; the ocean swells and subsides at the appointed times; the stars hold on their courses; the tribes of men and animals rise in perpetual succession; and all the operations of nature move on with the same order and regularity as when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy, as the green earth, in the freshness and perfection of its infancy, was launched from the hand of Omnipotence. Nor is the power of God less displayed in the moral government of the world. What fearful passions are at work around us, -- pride, malice, envy, revenge, hate, avarice, sensuality, and blood-thirstiness! We walk, as it were, among heated ploughshares and smothered fires. Nothing but the might of Omnipotence could hold men and devils in check, and prevent them from turning the universe into one vast and dismal scene of disorder, misery, and ruin. Lo! these are parts of his ways, but how small a portion of him is known! So great, so mighty, so glorious is the Being who lays his command upon us to repent. How dreadful must it be to provoke his wrath by disobedience! "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," except we have made a covenant with him by sacrifice, and are clothed in the clean linen of the saints, even the spotless robe of the Saviour's righteousness.

THE TIMES WHEN THE DUTY OF

REPENTANCE IS TO BE PERFORMED

The command is, NOW. "Now is the accepted time, and the day of salvation ;" "to-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart." Reader, what is your life? The sport of frailty and inconstancy; the life of an insect or a blade of grass. Job compares it to a shadow, a post, a weaver's shuttle, a swift passing ship, and an eagle hastening to his prey. David compares it to a flower, a hand-breadth, a mere vanity and emptiness. Isaiah compares it to the grass, the fading leaf, and the rapid wind. St. James compares it to a vapour, a morning mist, that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away. And St. Paul likens it to the shifting scenes of a theatre; a pageant, that flits before the eye, and vanishes for ever from its sight. To-day is ours; to-morrow, God's. This day, this hour, this instant, may fix the destinies of eternity. But even if the uncertainty were less, if life, and health, and reason were held upon a long and secure lease, it would still be madness to defer repentance. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good which are accustomed to do evil." (Jer. xiii. 23.) It is not an easy thing to root out habits which are the growth and product of a whole life of sin. "We find work enough to mortify one beloved lust, in our very best advantage of strength and time, before it is so deeply rooted, as it must needs be at the end of a wicked life." The work will then be great, and the strength little; the increase of the

one, and the decrease of the other, keeping an exact proportion. This is the reason why so few conversions take place after the meridian of life; and, next to the uncertainty of life, it is the strongest and the loudest call to immediate repentance that can be urged upon the sinner's attention and regard. Will not the younger portion of my readers lay the lesson seriously to heart?

THE URGENCY OF THE DUTY OF REPENTANCE

The obligation to repent is the result of a Divine command. "God now commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent." This is not mere counsel, persuasion, or entreaty. It is the voice of authority; the authority of the sovereign Lawgiver and Judge. How important must be the duty thus solemnly enjoined upon us by the Divine Being! Without repentance, perdition is inevitable; a perdition so dreadful that annihilation would be esteemed a blessing in comparison. But he that timely repents, confessing and forsaking his sin, shall find mercy; and, as the fruit of it, shall obtain the everlasting and glorious rewards of heaven. So great an excellency is repentance esteemed by God and the holy angels, that our Saviour tells us, that "there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth."

THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE DUTY OF REPENTANCE

The obligation reaches to "all men, everywhere." It is co-extensive with the depravity and sinfulness of man. The one is the measure of the other. What, then, is the testimony of Holy Scripture in reference to the extent of human depravity? "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God. They are all gone aside; they are together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no not one." (Ps. xiv. 2, 3.) We have before proved, both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin. (Rom. iii. 9.) "The Scripture hath concluded "all under sin." (Gal. iii. 22.) This, representation is confirmed by the concurrent testimony of all history and all experience. What havoc has sin made in the world, blasting the fair scenes of nature, and converting the earth into an abode of crime and terror. The heart of man is the seat of numerous evil passions, which, needing but an exciting cause and a favouring opportunity, break out into violence, murder, treachery, injustice, oppression, fraud, and all the crimes by which the peace of nations and of neighbourhoods is disturbed or destroyed. That all men do not run into this excess of wickedness is owing, not to any difference of nature, not to any innate goodness of heart, but to the counteracting and restraining grace of God. On seeing a man convicted of a capital crime passing to the place of execution, the illustrious author of the Pilgrim's Progress exclaimed, "There, but for the grace of God, goes John Bunyan!" So may each one of us say of ourselves.

God commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent, because all men, everywhere, are sinners. He commanded Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, and Paul to repent. He has laid the same command on all generations of men. He lays it upon you and upon me. The obligation rests alike upon believers and unbelievers, upon the justified and the unjustified. The former, indeed, are not, properly speaking, in sin. They are freed from its guilt and condemnation; but they are not wholly free from its evil influence. Sin still cleaves to them, and will continue to cleave to them, as long as they are in a militant state. Hence they are the subjects of repentance as long as they remain in this world.

APPLICATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF REPENTANCE

How alarming is the condition of impenitent sinners! The case of those who sleep while their house is in flames is sufficiently dreadful; but it is nothing to the sleep of the impenitent over the very brink of eternal perdition. Their souls, suspended over the gulf of ruin, dream not of danger. Sin has sealed up their powers in utter insensibility. Ah! my dear impenitent reader, suffer the friendly expostulation. Will you

longer postpone a present duty, imposed upon you by the command of your Maker, Lawgiver, and Judge? Will you brave the terrors of the Almighty? Will you turn away from a Father's face, beaming upon you in love and pity? Will you despise and resist the tender love of a bleeding Saviour? Remember that there is a turning-point in every man's existence. Every subject of God's moral government must be awakened at some period of his being. Every knee shall bow to God, and every tongue confess to him. Every mortal shall do him reverence, and mourn in bitterness of soul, either at the throne of grace or the throne of judgment. Blessed are they whose lot it is to be awakened in this life, and whose false and legal hopes, slain by the terrors of the Divine Law, issue in penitential grief and contrition. But alas ! for the finally impenitent! His awakening begins on a dying-bed, or in the gloomy valley of death, or at the bar of eternal judgment. He will then repent, but amid the unbroken darkness and horror of despair. He will weep endless, but unavailing tears.

"His hollow eyes will utter streams of woe;

There will be groans that end not, and the sighs

That always sigh, and tears that ever weep,

And ever fall, -- but not in mercy's sight,

And sorrow and repentance and despair

Among them walk, and to their thirsty lips

Present the frequent cups of burning gall."

But to you, reader, this deep and hopeless darkness has not yet come. Mercy's voice still sounds in your ears. God, as a loving though offended Father, still waits for your repentance and return. His hand is stretched out for your salvation. Gladly would he hurry you away from the city of destruction. Oh yield your heart to the gentle influences of his love, lest at an hour when you think not, his wrath, like a thunderbolt, crush your soul and hopes together into irremediable ruin.

"Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little."

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