

REPENTANCE

by J. C. Ryle

“Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish.” Luke 13:3

The text which heads this page, at first sight, looks stern and severe, “Except you repent, you shall all perish.” I can fancy someone saying, “Is this the Gospel?” “Are these the glad tidings? Are these the good news of which ministers speak?” “This is a hard saying, who can hear it?” (John 6:60.)

But from whose lips did these words come? They came from the lips of One who loves us with a love that passes knowledge, even Jesus Christ, the Son of God. They were spoken by One who so loved us that He left heaven for our sakes—came down to earth for our sakes—lived a poor, humble life, for three and thirty years on earth for our sakes—went to the cross for us, went to the grave for us, and died for our sins. The words that come from lips like these, must surely be words of love.

And, after all, what greater proof of love can be given than to warn a friend of coming danger? The father who sees his son tottering toward the brink of a precipice, and as he sees him cries out sharply, “Stop, stop!”—does not that father love his son? The tender mother who sees her infant on the point of eating some poisonous berry, and cries out sharply, “Stop, stop! put it down!”—does not that mother love that child? It is indifference which lets people alone, and allows them to go on each in his own way. It is love, tender love, which warns, and raises the cry of alarm. The cry of “Fire—fire!” at midnight, may sometimes startle a man out of his sleep, rudely, harshly, unpleasantly. But who would complain, if that cry was the means of saving his life? The words, “Except you repent, you shall all perish,” may seem at first sight stern and severe. But they are words of love, and may be the means of delivering precious souls from hell.

There are three things to which I ask attention in considering this text of Scripture.

First of all, I will speak of [the nature of repentance](#)—What is it?

Secondly, I will speak of [the necessity of repentance](#)—Why is repentance needful?

Thirdly, I will speak of [the encouragements to repentance](#)—What is there to lead people to repent?

And then some [practical affectionate applications](#) to the souls of all who read it.

I. First of all, [the NATURE of repentance—What is it?](#)

Let us see that we set down our feet firmly on this point. The importance of the inquiry cannot be overrated. Repentance is one of the foundation-stones of Christianity. Sixty times, at least, we find repentance spoken of in the New Testament. What was the first doctrine our Lord Jesus Christ preached? We are told that He said, “Repent, and believe the Gospel.” (Mark 1:15.) What did the Apostles proclaim when the Lord sent them forth the first time? They “preached that people should repent.” (Mark 6:12.) What was the charge which Jesus gave His disciples when He left the world? That “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations.” (Luke 24:47.) What was the concluding appeal of the first sermons which Peter preached? “Repent, and be baptized.” “Repent you, and be converted.” (Acts 2:38; 3:19.) What was the summary of doctrine which Paul gave to the Ephesian elders, when he parted from them? He told them that he had taught them publicly, and from house to house, “testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 20:21.) What was the description which Paul gave of his own ministry, when he made his defense before Festus and Agrippa? He told them that he had taught all people that they should “repent, and do works fit for repentance.” (Acts 26:20.) What was the account given by the believers at Jerusalem of the conversion of the Gentiles? When they heard of it they said, “Then has God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.” (Acts 11:18.) What is one of the first qualifications which the Church of England requires of all people that would come to the Lord’s table? They are to “examine themselves whether they repent them truly of their former sins.” No impenitent person, according to the Church of England, ought ever to come to the Lord’s table. Surely we must all agree that these are serious considerations. They ought to show the importance of the inquiry I am now making. A mistake about

repentance is a most dangerous mistake. An error about repentance is an error that lies at the very roots of our religion. What, then, is repentance? When can it be said of any man, that he repents?

Repentance is a thorough change of man's natural heart, upon the subject of **sin**. We are all born in sin. We naturally love sin. We take to sin, as soon as we can act and think—just as the bird takes to flying, and the fish takes to swimming. There never was a child that required schooling or education in order to learn deceitfulness, selfishness, passion, self-will, gluttony, pride, and foolishness. These things are not picked up from bad companions, or gradually learned by a long course of tedious instruction. They spring up of themselves, even when boys and girls are brought up alone. The seeds of them are evidently the natural product of the heart. The aptitude of all children to these evil things is an unanswerable proof of the corruption and fall of man. Now when this heart of ours is changed by the Holy Spirit, when this natural love of sin is cast out, then takes place that change which the Word of God calls "repentance." The man in whom the change is wrought is said to "repent." He may be called, in one word, a "penitent" man.

But I dare not leave the subject here. It deserves a closer and more searching investigation. It is not safe to deal in general statements, when doctrines of this kind are handled. I will try to take repentance to pieces, and dissect and analyze it before your eyes. I will show you the parts and portions of which repentance is made up. I will endeavor to set before you something of the experience of every truly penitent man.

(a) True repentance begins with KNOWLEDGE of sin. The eyes of the penitent man are opened. He sees with dismay and confusion the length and breadth of God's holy law, and the extent, the enormous extent, of his own transgressions. He discovers, to his surprise, that in thinking himself a "good sort of man," and a man with a "good heart," he has been under a huge delusion. He finds out that, in reality, he is wicked, and guilty, and corrupt, and evil in God's sight. His pride breaks down. His high thoughts melt away. He sees that he is a great sinner. This is the first step in true repentance.

(b) True repentance goes on to work SORROW for sin. The heart of a penitent man is touched with deep remorse because of his past transgressions. He is cut to the heart to think that he should have lived so madly and so wickedly. He mourns over time wasted, over talents misspent, over God dishonored, over his own soul injured. The remembrance of these things is grievous to him. The burden of these things is sometimes almost intolerable. When a man so sorrows, you have the second step in true repentance.

(c) True repentance proceeds, further, to produce CONFESSION of sin. The tongue of a penitent man is loosed. He feels he must speak to that God against whom he has sinned. Something within him tells him he must cry to God, and pray to God, and talk with God, about the state of his own soul. He must pour out his heart, and acknowledge his iniquities, at the throne of grace. They are a heavy burden within him, and he can no longer keep silence. He can keep nothing back. He will not hide anything. He goes before God, pleading nothing for himself, and willing to say, "I have sinned against heaven and before You—my iniquity is great. God be merciful to me, a sinner!" When a man goes thus to God in confession, you have the third step in true repentance.

(d) True repentance, furthermore, shows itself in a thorough BREAKING OFF from sin. The life of a penitent man is altered. The course of his daily conduct is entirely changed. A new King reigns within his heart. He puts off the old man. What God commands he now desires to practice; and what God forbids he now desires to avoid. He strives in all ways to keep clear of sin, to fight with sin, to war with sin, to get the victory over sin. He ceases to do evil. He learns to do well. He breaks off sharply from bad ways and bad companions. He labors, however feebly, to live a new life. When a man does this, you have the fourth step in true repentance.

(e) True repentance, in the last place, shows itself by producing in the heart a settled habit of deep HATRED of all sin. The mind of a penitent man becomes a mind habitually holy. He abhors that which is evil, and cleaves to that which is good. He delights in the law of God. He comes short of his own desires not unfrequently. He finds in himself an evil principle warring against the spirit of God. He finds himself cold when he would be hot; backward when he would be forward; heavy when he would be lively in God's service. He is deeply conscious of his own infirmities. He groans under a sense of indwelling

corruption. But still, for all that, the general bias of his heart is towards God, and away from evil. He can say with David, “I count all Your precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way.” (Psalm. 119:128.) When a man can say this, you have the fifth, or crowning step, of true repentance.

But now, is the picture of repentance complete? Can I leave the subject here, and go on? I cannot do it. There remains yet one thing behind which ought never to be forgotten. Were I not to mention this one thing, I might make hearts sad that God would not have made sad, and raise seeming barriers between men’s souls and heaven. True repentance, such as I have just described, is never alone in the heart of any man. It always has a companion—a blessed companion. It is always accompanied by **lively FAITH** in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Wherever faith is, there is repentance; wherever repentance is, there is always faith. I do not decide which comes first—whether repentance comes before faith, or faith before repentance. But I am bold to say that the two graces are never found separate, one from the other. Just as you cannot have the sun without light, or ice without cold, or fire without heat, or water without moisture—so long **you will never find true faith without true repentance, and you will never find true repentance without lively faith.** The two things will always go side by side.

And now, before I go any further, let us search and try our own hearts, and see what we know about true repentance. I do not affirm that the experience of all penitent people tallies exactly, precisely, and minutely. I do not say that any man ever knows sin, or mourns for sin, or confesses sin, or forsakes sin, or hates sin, perfectly, thoroughly, completely, and as he ought. But this I do say, that all true Christians will recognize something which they know and have felt, in the things which I have just been saying.

Repentance, such as I have described, will be, in the main, the experience of every true believer. Search, then, and see what you know of it in your own soul.

Beware that you make no mistake about the nature of true repentance. The devil knows too well the value of that precious grace not to dress up spurious imitations of it. Wherever there is good coin there will always be bad money. Wherever there is a valuable grace, the devil will put in circulation counterfeits and shams of that grace, and try to palm them off on men’s souls. Make sure that you are not deceived.

(a) Take heed that your repentance be a business of your heart. It is not a grave face, or a sanctimonious countenance, or a round of self-imposed austerities; it is not this alone which makes up true repentance towards God. The real grace is something far deeper than a mere affair of face, and clothes, and days, and forms. Ahab could put on sackcloth when it served his turn. But Ahab never repented.

(b) Take heed that your repentance be a repentance wherein you turn to God. Roman Catholics can run to priests and confessionals, when they are frightened. Felix could tremble, when he heard the Apostle Paul preach. But all this is not true repentance. See that your repentance leads you unto God, and makes you flee to Him as your best Friend.

(c) Take heed that your repentance be a repentance attended by a thorough forsaking of sin. Sentimental people can cry when they hear moving sermons on Sundays, and yet return to the ball, the theater, and the opera in the week after. Herod liked to hear John the Baptist preach, and heard him gladly, “and did many things.” But feelings in religion are worse than worthless, unless they are accompanied by practice. Mere sentimental excitement, without thorough breaking off from sin, is not the repentance which God approves. (Mark 6:20.)

(d) Take heed, above all things, that your repentance is closely bound up with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. See that your convictions are convictions which never rest except at the foot of the cross whereon Jesus Christ died. Judas Iscariot could say, “I have sinned,” but Judas never turned to Jesus. Judas never looked by faith to Jesus, and therefore Judas died in his sins. Give me that conviction of sin which makes a man flee to Christ, and mourn, because by his sins he has pierced the Lord who bought him. Give me that contrition of soul under which a man feels much about Christ, and grieves to think of the despite he has done to so gracious a Savior. Going to Sinai, hearing about the ten commandments, looking at hell, thinking about the terrors of damnation—all this may make people afraid, and has its use. But no repentance ever lasts in which a man does not look at Calvary more than at Sinai, and see in a

bleeding Jesus the strongest motive for contrition. Such repentance comes down from heaven. Such repentance is planted in man's heart by God the Holy Spirit.

II. I pass on now to the second point which I proposed to handle. I will consider [the NECESSITY of repentance](#). Why is repentance needful?

The text which stands at the head of this paper shows clearly the necessity of repentance. The words of our Lord Jesus Christ are distinct, express, and emphatic, "Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish." All, all, without exception, need repentance toward God. It is not only necessary for thieves, murderers, drunkards, adulterers, fornicators, and the inhabitants of prisons and of jails. No—all born of Adam, all, without exception, need repentance toward God. The queen upon her throne and the pauper in the workhouse, the rich man in his drawing room, the servant maid in the kitchen, the professor of sciences at the University, the poor ignorant boy who follows the plough—all by nature need repentance. All are born in sin, and all must repent and be converted, if they would be saved. All must have their hearts changed about sin. All must repent, as well as believe the Gospel. "Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven." "Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish." (Matt. 18:3; Luke 13:3.)

But whence comes the necessity of repentance? Why is such tremendously strong language used about this necessity? What are the reasons, what the causes, why repentance is so needful?

(a) For one thing, without repentance there is no forgiveness of sins. In saying this, I must guard myself against misconstruction. I ask you emphatically not to misunderstand me. The tears of repentance wash away no sins. It is bad theology to say that they do. That is the office, that the work of the blood of Christ alone. Contrition makes no atonement for transgression. It is wretched theology to say that it does. It can do nothing of the kind. Our best repentance is a poor, imperfect thing—and needs repenting over again. Our best contrition has defects enough about it to sink us into hell. "We are counted righteous before God only for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings," not for our repentance, holiness, almsgiving, sacrament receiving, or anything of the kind. All this is perfectly true.

But still it is no less true that justified people are always penitent people, and that a forgiven sinner will always be a man who mourns over, and loathes his sins. God in Christ is willing to receive rebellious man, and grant him peace, if he only come to Him in Christ's name however wicked he may have been. But God requires, and requires justly, that the rebel shall throw down his arms. The Lord Jesus Christ is ready to pity, pardon, relieve, cleanse, wash, sanctify, and fit for heaven. But the Lord Jesus Christ desires to see a man hate the sins that he wishes to be forgiven. Let some people call this "legality" if they will. Let some call it "bondage" if they please. I take my stand on Scripture. The testimony of God's Word is plain and unmistakable. Justified people are always penitent people. Without repentance there is no forgiveness of sins.

(b) For another thing, without repentance there is no happiness in the life that now is. There may be high spirits, excitement, laughter and merriment, so long as health is good, and money is in the pocket. But these things are not solid happiness. There is a conscience in all people, and that conscience must be satisfied. So long as conscience feels that sin has not been repented of and forsaken, so long it will not be quiet, and will not let a man feel comfortable within. We all of us have an inner man, unknown to the world—an inner man, with which our companions and friends have often no acquaintance. That inner man has a burden upon it, so long as sin is not repented of; and until that burden is taken off, that inner man has no real comfort. Can you and I be comfortable, when we are not in a right position? It is impossible. And what is a man's true position? He is never in his right position until he has turned his back upon sin, and turned his face towards God.

A man's house is never comfortable until all things are in order. And when is the house of the inward man in order? Never, until God is king, and the world put down in the second place; never, until God is upon the throne, and sin cast down and put out of doors. You might as well expect the solar system to go on well without the sun, as expect that heart of yours to be comfortable when God is not in His place. The great account with God must be settled. The King must be upon His throne. Then, and not until then,

there will be peace within. Without repentance there can be no true happiness. We must repent if we want to be happy.

(c) For another thing, without repentance there can be no fitness for heaven in the world that is yet to come. Heaven is a prepared place, and those who go to heaven must be a prepared people. Our hearts must be in tune for the employments of heaven, or else heaven itself would be a miserable abode. Our minds must be in harmony with those of the inhabitants of heaven, or else the society of heaven would soon be intolerable to us. Gladly would I help everyone to heaven into whose hands this paper may fall. But I never would have you ignorant that if you went there with an impenitent heart, heaven would be no heaven to your soul. What could you possibly do in heaven, if you got there with a heart loving sin? To which of all the saints would you speak? By whose side would you sit down? Surely the angels of God would make no sweet music to the heart of him who cannot bear saints upon earth, and never praised the Lamb for redeeming love! Surely the company of patriarchs, and apostles, and prophets, would be no joy to that man who will not read his Bible now, and does not care to know what apostles and prophets wrote.

Oh, no! no! there can be no happiness in heaven, if we get there with an impenitent heart. The fish is not happy when it is out of water. The bird is not happy when it is confined in a cage. And why? They are all out of their proper element and natural position. And man, unconverted man, impenitent man, would not be happy if he got to heaven without a heart changed by the Holy Spirit. He would be a creature out of his proper element. He would have no faculties to enable him to enjoy his holy abode. Without a penitent heart there is no “fitness for the inheritance of the saints in light.” We must repent, if we want to go to heaven. (Coloss. 1:12.)

I beseech you by the mercies of God, to lay to heart the things which I have just been saying, and to ponder them well. You live in a world of cheating, imposition, and deception. Let no man deceive you about the necessity of repentance. Oh, that professing Christians would see, and know, and feel, more than they do—the necessity, the absolute necessity, of true repentance towards God! There are many things which are not needful. Riches are not needful. Health is not needful. Fine clothes are not needful. Noble friends are not needful. The favor of the world is not needful. Gifts and learning are not needful. Millions have reached heaven without these things. Thousands are reaching heaven every year without them. But no one ever reached heaven without “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Let no man ever persuade you that any religion deserves to be called the Gospel, in which repentance toward God has not a most prominent place. A Gospel, indeed! That is no Gospel in which repentance is not a principal thing. A Gospel! It is the Gospel of man—but not of God. A Gospel! It comes from earth—but not from heaven. A Gospel! It is not the Gospel at all; it is rank antinomianism, and nothing else. So long as you hug your sins, and cleave to your sins, and will have your sins, so long you may talk as you please about the Gospel—but your sins are not forgiven. You may call that legal, if you like. You may say, if you please, you “hope it will be all right at the last—God is merciful—God is love—Christ has died—I hope I shall go to heaven after all.” No! I tell you, it is not all right. It will never be all right, at that rate. You are trampling under foot the blood of atonement. You have as yet no part or lot in Christ. So long as you do not repent of sin, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is no Gospel to your soul. Christ is a Savior from sin—not a Savior for man in sin. If a man will have his sins, the day will come when that merciful Savior will say to him, “Depart from Me, you worker of iniquity! Depart into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” (Matt. 25:41.)

Let no man ever delude you into supposing that you can be happy in this world without repentance. Oh, no! You may laugh and dance, and go upon vacations, and crack good jokes, and sing good songs, and say, “Cheer, boys, cheer!” and “There’s a good time coming!”—but all this is no proof that you are happy. So long as you do not quarrel with sin, you will never be a truly happy man. Thousands go on for a time in this way, and seem merry before the eyes of others, and yet in their hearts carry about a lurking sorrow. When they are alone they are wretched. When they are not in jovial company they are low. Conscience makes cowards of them. They do not like being by themselves. They hate quiet thinking. They must constantly have some new excitement. Every year they must have more. Just as an opium-eater

needs a larger and larger doses—so does the man who seeks happiness in anything except in God need greater excitement every year that he lives, and after all is never really happy.

Yes! and worse than all, the longer you go on without repentance, the more unhappy will that heart of yours be. When old age creeps over you, and grey hairs appear upon your head—when you are unable to go where you once went, and take pleasure where you once took pleasure—your wretchedness and misery will break in upon you like an armed man. The more impenitent a man is, the more miserable he becomes. Have you ever heard of the great clock of St. Paul's cathedral, in London? At midday, in the roar of business, when carriages, and carts, and wagons, and omnibuses, go rolling through the streets, how many never hear that great clock strike, unless they live very near it. But when the work of the day is over, and the roar of business has passed away—when people are gone to sleep, and silence reigns in London—then at twelve, at one, at two, at three, at four, the sound of that clock may be heard for miles round. Twelve! One! Two! Three! Four! How that clock is heard by many a sleepless man! That clock is just like the conscience of the impenitent man. While he has health and strength, and goes on in the whirl of business, he will not hear conscience. He drowns and silences its voice by plunging into the world. He will not allow the inner man to speak to him. But the day will come when conscience will be heard, whether he likes it or not. The day will come when its voice will sound in his ears, and pierce him like a sword. The time will come when he must retire from the world, and lie down on the sick bed, and look death in the face. And then the clock of conscience, that solemn clock, will sound in his heart, and if he has not repented, will bring wretchedness and misery to his soul Oh, no! write it down in the tablets of your heart—without repentance no peace!

Above all, let no man make you dream that there is a possibility of reaching heaven without repentance toward God. We all want to go to heaven. A man would be justly set down as a madman, if he said that he wanted to go to hell. But never let it be forgotten, that none go to heaven except those whom the Holy Spirit has prepared for it. I make my solemn protest against those modern delusions, "that all people shall go to heaven at last—that it matters not how you live—that whether you are holy or unholy it does not matter—that whether you are godless or God-fearing, it is all the same thing, that all at last will get to heaven." I cannot find such teaching in the Bible. I find the Bible contradicting it flatly. However speciously this new idea may be propounded, and however plausibly it may be defended, it cannot stand the test of the Word of God. No! let God be true, and every man a liar. Heaven is no such place as some seem to fancy. The inhabitants of heaven are no such mixed multitude as many try to believe. They are all of one heart, and one mind. Heaven is the place to which God's people shall go. But for those who are impenitent and unbelieving, and will not come to Christ, for such the Bible says, plainly and unmistakably, there remains nothing but hell.

It is a solemn thought that an impenitent man is unfit for heaven. He could not be happy in heaven, if he got there. I remember hearing of a clergyman who many years ago was traveling by coach. He sat by the coachman's side. The coachman was one of those unhappy people who fancy nothing is to be done without swearing. He was cursing, swearing, blaspheming, taking God's name in vain, for many a long mile together. On he drove, now flying into a passion, now beating his horses, now cursing and swearing again. Such were the coachman's ways. At last the clergyman said to him quietly, "Coachman, I am exceedingly afraid for you." "Sir," said the coachman, "what should you be afraid of? All is going on right, we are not likely to be upset." "Coachman," said the clergyman again, "I am exceedingly afraid for you; because I cannot think what you would do in heaven, if you got there. There will be no cursing in heaven; there will be no swearing in heaven; there will be no passion in heaven; there will be no horses to beat in heaven." "Coachman," said the minister once more, "I can not think what you would do in heaven." "Oh," said the coachman, "that is your opinion," and no more was said. Years passed away. A day came when a person told this same clergyman that a sick man desired to see him. He was a stranger. He had come into the parish, he said, because he wanted to die there. The clergyman went to see him. He entered a room and found a dying man, whose face he did not know. "Sir," said the dying man, "you do not remember me?" "No," said the clergyman, "I do not." "Sir," said the man, "I remember you. I am that coachman to whom, many years ago, you said, 'Coachman, I am afraid for you, because I do not know what you would do if you got to heaven.' Sir, those words laid hold upon me. I saw I was not fit to die.

Those words worked, and worked, and worked in my heart, and I never rested until I had repented of sin, and fled to Christ, and found peace in Him, and became a new man. And now,” said he, “by the grace of God I trust I am prepared to meet my Maker, and am fit for the inheritance of the saints in light.”

Once more I charge you to remember—without repentance toward God, there can be no fitness for heaven. It would give pain to an impenitent man to place him there. It would be no mercy to him. He would not be happy. He could not be happy. There could be no enjoyment in heaven to a man who got there without a heart hating sin, and a heart loving God. I expect to see many wonders at the last day. I expect to see some at the right hand of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom I once feared I would see upon the left. I expect to see some at the left hand whom I supposed to be good Christians, and expected to see at the right. But there is one thing I am sure I shall not see. I shall not see at the right hand of Jesus Christ one single impenitent man. I shall see Abraham there, who said, “I am dust and ashes.” I shall see Jacob there, who said, “I am not worthy of the least of all Your mercies.” I shall see Job there, who said, “I am vile.” I shall see David there, who said, “I was shaped in iniquity—in sin did my mother conceive me.” I shall see Isaiah there, who said, “I am a man of unclean lips.” I shall see Paul there, who said, “I am the chief of sinners.” (Gen. 18:27; 32:10; Job. 40:4; Psalm 51:5; Isa. 6:5; 1 Tim. 1:15.) I shall see the martyr John Bradford there, who often signed himself at the end of his letters, “That wretched sinner, that miserable sinner, John Bradford,” that same John Bradford who said, whenever he saw a man going to be hanged, “There goes John Bradford—but for the grace of God.” I shall see Usher there, whose last words were, “Pardon my many sins, especially my sins of omission.” I shall see Grimshaw there, whose last words were, “Here goes an unprofitable servant.” But they will all be of one heart, one mind, one experience. They will all have **hated** sin. They will all have **mourned** for sin. They will all have **confessed** sin. They will all have **forsaken** sin. They will all have **repented** as well as believed, repented toward God as well as believed in Jesus Christ. They will all say with one voice, “What has God wrought!” They will all say, “By the grace of God I am where I am,” as well as “By the grace of God I am what I am.”

III. I come now to the third and last thing of which I promised to speak. I will consider **the ENCOURAGEMENTS to repentance**. What is there to lead a man to repent?

I feel it very important to say something on this point. I know that many difficulties arise in the way when the subject of repentance is brought before us. I know how slow man is to give up sin. You might as well tell him to cut off a right hand, or pluck out a right eye, or cut off a right foot—as tell him to part with his darling sins. I know the strength of old **habits** and early ways of thinking about religion. At first they are all like cobwebs. At last they are iron chains. I know the power of pride, and that “fear of man that brings a snare.” I know the dislike there is in people to being thought a saint, and supposed to care about religion. I know that hundreds and thousands would never shrink from going to war—and yet cannot bear to be laughed at and thought ridiculous because they care for their souls. And I know, too, the malice of our great enemy, the devil. Will he part with his “lawful captives” without a conflict? Never! Will he give up his prey without a fight? Never! I once saw a lion, at the Zoological Gardens, being fed. I saw his meal cast down before him. I saw the keeper try to take that meal away. I remember the lion’s roar, his spring, his struggle to retain his food. And I remember the “roaring lion that walks about, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Pet. 5:8.) Will he give up a man, and let him repent, without a struggle? Never, never, never! Man needs many encouragements to make him repent.

But there are encouragements, great, broad, wide, full and free. There are things in the Word of God which ought to nerve every heart, and arouse everyone to repent without delay. I desire to bring these things before the readers of this volume. I would not have one soul lay down this paper and say, “The thing cannot be done—it is impossible.” I should like all to say, “There is hope—there is hope! There is an open door! It is possible—the thing can be done! By the grace of God a man may repent!”

(a) Hear, for one thing, what a gracious Savior the Lord Jesus Christ is. I place Him first and foremost, as the great argument to encourage a man to repentance. I say to every doubting soul, Look at Christ, think of Christ. He is one “able to save to the uttermost, all who come unto God by Him.” He is one anointed “a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance as well as remission of sins.” He is one who

“came to seek and to save that which was lost.” He is one who said, “I came not to call the righteous—but sinners to repentance.” He is one who cries, “Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” He is one who has pledged His royal word, “Him who comes unto Me, I will never cast out.” And He it is of whom it is written, “As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on His name.” I answer all doubts, and questions, and difficulties, and objections, and fears with this simple argument. I say to everyone who wants encouragement, Look at Christ, think of Christ. Consider Jesus Christ the Lord; and then doubt about repentance no more. (Heb. 7:25; Acts 5:31; Luke 19:10; Mark 2:17; Matt. 11:28; John 6:37; John 1:12.)

(b) Hear, for another thing, what glorious promises the Word of God contains. It is written, “Whoever confesses and forsakes his sins shall find mercy.” It is written again, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” It is written again, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” Surely these promises are encouragements. Again I say, doubt about repentance no more. (Prov. 28:13; 1 John 1:9; Matt. 5:3, 4, 6.)

(c) Hear, for another thing, what gracious declarations the Word of God contains, “When the wicked man turns away from his wickedness that he has committed, and does that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.” “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit—a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.” “God is not willing that any should perish—but that all should come to repentance.” “As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked—turn! Turn! Why will you die?” “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents.” (Ezek. 18:27; Psalm 51:17; 2 Pet. 3:9; Ezek. 33:11; Luke 15:10.) Surely those words are encouraging, if any words can be! Again I say, doubt about repentance no more.

(d) Hear, for another thing, what marvelous parables our Lord Jesus spoke upon this subject. “Two men went up to the temple complex to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee took his stand and was praying like this: ‘God, I thank You that I’m not like other people—greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of everything I get.’ “But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even raise his eyes to heaven but kept striking his chest and saying, ‘God, turn Your wrath from me—a sinner!’ I tell you, this one went down to his house justified rather than the other; because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 23:10-14.)

Hear, again, that other marvelous parable—the parable of the prodigal son. “A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate I have coming to me.’ So he distributed the assets to them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all he had and traveled to a distant country, where he squandered his estate in foolish living. After he had spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he had nothing. Then he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. He longed to eat his fill from the carob pods the pigs were eating, but no one would give him any. When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have more than enough food, and here I am dying of hunger! I’ll get up, go to my father, and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I’m no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired hands.’ So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I’m no longer worthy to be called your son.’ “But the father told his slaves, ‘Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let’s celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ So they began to celebrate.” (Luke 15:11-24.) Surely these are mighty encouragements to repentance. Again I say, doubt about repentance no more.

(e) Hear, lastly, what wonderful examples there are in the Word of God, of God’s mercy and kindness to penitent people. Read the story of **David**. What sin can be greater than David’s sin? But when David turned to the Lord, and said, “I have sinned against the Lord,” the answer came, “The Lord

has put away your sin.” Read the story of **Manasseh**. What wickedness could have been greater than his? He killed his own children. He turned his back upon his father’s God. He placed idols in the temple. And yet, when Manasseh was in prison and humbled himself, and prayed to the Lord, the Lord heard his prayer, and brought him out of captivity. Read the history of **Peter**. What apostasy could be greater than his? He denied his Master three times over with an oath! And yet, when Peter wept, and mourned for his sin, there was mercy even for Peter, and penitent Peter was restored to his Master’s favor. Read the story of the **penitent thief**. What case could be more desperate than his? He was a dying man on the brink of hell. Yet when he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom,” at once the marvelous answer came, “Verily I say unto you, Today shall you” (even you) “be with Me in paradise.” (2 Sam. 12:13; 2 Chron. 33:1-19; Mark 16:7; Luke 23:39-43.)

What greater encouragement to repentance can be imagined or conceived? Why are all these cases recorded for our learning? They are intended to lead people to repentance. They are all patterns of God’s long-suffering—patterns of God’s mercy—patterns of God’s willingness to receive penitent sinners. They are proofs of what God’s grace can do. They are a cloud of witnesses, proving that it is worth while for man to repent—that there is encouragement for man to turn to God, and that such a one as goes on still in his sins is utterly without excuse. “The goodness of God leads him to repentance.” (Rom. 2:4.)

I remember hearing of a mother whose daughter ran away from her, and lived a life of sin. For a long time no one could tell where she was. Yet that daughter came back and was reclaimed. She became a true penitent. She was taught to mourn for sin. She turned to Christ and believed in Him. Old things passed away, and all things became new. Her mother was asked one day to tell what she had done to bring her daughter back. What means had she used? What steps had she taken? Her reply was a very striking one. She said, “I prayed for her night and day.” But that was not all. She went on to say, “I never went to bed at night without leaving my front door unlocked, and the door on the latch. I thought if my daughter came back some night when I was in bed, she should never be able to say that she found the door shut. She should never be able to say that she came to her mother’s home—but could not get in.” And so it turned out. Her daughter came back one night, and tried the door, and found the door open, and at once came in, to go out and sin no more. That open door was the saving of her soul.

That open door is a beautiful illustration of the heart of God towards sinners! The door of mercy is set wide open. The door is not yet locked. The door is always upon the latch. God’s heart is full of love. God’s heart is full of compassion. Whoever a man may have been, and whatever a man may have been, at midnight, at any time, whenever he returns to God, he will find God willing to receive him, ready to pardon him, and glad to have him at home. All things are ready. Whoever will, may come in.

And, out of all the millions who have turned to God and repented, who ever repented of repentance? I answer boldly, Not one! Thousands every year repent of folly and unbelief. Thousands mourn over time misspent. Thousands regret their drunkenness, and gambling, and fornication, and oaths, and idleness; and neglected opportunities. But no one has ever risen up and declared to the world that he repents of repenting and turning toward God. The steps in the narrow way of life are all in one direction. You will never see in the narrow way the step of one who turned back because the narrow way was not good.

I remember reading of a remarkable event that occurred in a place of worship where a Puritan minister, Mr. Doolittle, was preaching, two hundred years ago. Just as he was about to begin his sermon, he saw a young man, a stranger, coming into his church. He guessed by the young man’s manner that he was anxious about his soul, and yet undecided about religion. He took a remarkable course with him. He tried a curious experiment—but God blessed it to the young man’s soul. Before Mr. Doolittle gave out his text, he turned to an old Christian whom he saw on one side of his church. He addressed him by name, and said to him, “Brother, do you repent of having served God?” The old Christian stood up manfully before the congregation, and said, “Sir, I have served the Lord from my youth, and He has never done me anything but good.” He turned to the left hand, where he saw another Christian, and addressed him in the same way. “Brother,” said he, calling him by his name, “Do you repent of having served Christ?” That man also stood up manfully before the congregation, and said, “Sir, I never was truly happy until I took up the cross, and served the Lord Jesus Christ.” Then Mr. Doolittle turned to the young man, and said, “Young man, will you repent? Young man, will you take up the cross? Young man, will you this day

begin to serve Christ?" God sent power with these words. The young man stood up before the congregation, and said in a humble tone, "Yes sir, I will." That very day was the beginning of eternal life in the young man's soul. We may depend upon it, the two answers which Mr. Doolittle got that day are the experience of all true Christians.

We may be quite sure that no man ever repents of repentance. No man was ever sorry that he served the Lord. No man ever said at the end of his days, "I have read my Bible too much, I have thought of God too much, I have prayed too much, I have been too concerned about my soul." Oh, no! The people of God would always say, "Had I my life over again, I would walk far more closely with God than ever I have done. I am sorry that I have not served God better—but I am not sorry that I have served Him. The way of Christ may have its cross. But it is a way of pleasantness, and a path of peace." Surely that fact alone speaks volumes. It is a fact that clinches every argument which I have already advanced. Surely it is worthwhile for a man to repent. There are encouragements. The impenitent man is without excuse.

And now, I have brought before my readers the three points which I proposed at the outset of this paper to consider. I have shown you the **nature** of repentance toward God—the **necessity** of repentance—and the **encouragements** to repentance. It only remains to conclude this paper by a few words of **practical affectionate APPLICATION** to the souls of all who read it.

(1) My first word shall be a word of **WARNING**. I offer an affectionate warning to every impenitent soul into whose hands this volume may fall. I cannot for a moment suppose that all who read its pages are truly repentant toward God, and lively believers in Jesus Christ. I dare not think it. I cannot think it. And my first word shall be a word of warning—tender, affectionate warning, to all impenitent and unconverted people who may happen to read this paper.

What stronger warning can I give you than that which my text contains? What words can I use more solemn and more heart-searching than the words of my Lord and Master, "Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish!" Yes! you who are reading, and, as you read, know you are not yet at peace with God, you who are halting, lingering, undecided, in religion—you are the man to whom the words of the text should come with power, "Except you repent, you," even you, "shall perish!"

Oh, think what dreadful words are these! Who can measure out the full amount of what they contain? "Shall perish!" Perish in body—perish in soul—perish miserably at last in hell! I dare not attempt to paint the horrors of that thought. The worm that never dies, the fire that is not quenched, the blackness of darkness forever, the hopeless prison, the bottomless pit, the lake that burns with fire and brimstone—all, all are but feeble emblems of the reality of hell. And to this hell all impenitent people are daily traveling! Yes—from churches and chapels, from rich men's mansions and poor men's cottages, from the midst of knowledge, wealth, and respectability—all who will not repent are certainly traveling towards hell. "Except you repent, you shall all perish!"

Think how great is your **DANGER**! Where are your sins, your many sins? You know you are a sinner. You must be aware of it. It is vain to pretend you have committed no sins. And where are your sins, if you have never yet repented, never mourned for sin, never confessed sin, never fled to Christ, and never found pardon through Christ's blood? Oh, take heed to yourself. The pit opens her mouth for you. The devil is saying of you, "He will be mine!" Take heed to yourself. Remember the words of the text, "Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish." They are not my words—but Christ's words. It is not my saying—but Christ's saying. Christ says it. Christ, the merciful—Christ, the gracious says, "Except you repent, you will certainly perish."

Think again of your **GUILT**. Yes, I say, deliberately, think of your guilt. It is guilt when a man does not repent. We are responsible and accountable to God for repentance. It is vain to say we are not. What does Paul say to the Athenians, "God commands all people everywhere to repent." (Acts 17:30.) What does our Lord say of Chorazin and Bethsaida? Why were they so guilty? Why was their position in hell to be so intolerable? Because they would not repent and believe. It is the express testimony of the Son of God that the impenitent man who has been called to repentance, and refused to obey the call, is more guilty than the man who has never been urged to repent.

Think of the **FOLLY** of remaining an impenitent man! Yes, I say the folly. The world you cleave to is melting beneath your feet already. What will bank-notes do for you in the life to come? What will your gold be worth to you a hundred years hence? When your last hour comes, what can all the gold in the globe do for you, if you die an impenitent man? You live for the world, perhaps, now. You strive hard and furiously to be successful in business. You compass sea and land to add acre to acre, or accumulate stock in the funds. You do all you can to get money, to amass riches, to make yourself comfortable, to have pleasure, to leave something for wife and children when you die. But, oh, remember! Remember, if you have not got the grace of God and true repentance, you are a poor man, a pauper in the sight of God.

I shall never forget the effect produced upon my own mind when I read some years ago of that fearful shipwreck, the loss of the 'Central America'—a great steamer which was lost on the voyage from Havannah to New York. That steamer was bringing home from California three or four hundred gold-diggers. They had all got their gold, and were coming home, proposing to spend their latter days in ease in their own country. But man proposes—and God disposes.

About twenty-four hours after the Central America left Havannah, a mighty storm arose. Three or four heavy seas in succession struck the ship, and seriously damaged her. The engines became disabled and useless, and she was tossed by the wild sea. She sprung a leak, and in spite of every effort the ship began to fill. And after a while, when all on board had pumped and baled, and baled and pumped, until they were exhausted, it became plain that the Central America, with her three or four hundred passengers and all her crew, was likely to go down into the deep, deep sea, and carry nearly all on board with her. The crew launched the only boats they had. They placed the women passengers in these boats, with just a sufficient complement of sailors to manage them. All honor be to them for their kind feeling to the weak and defenseless at a time like that! The boats put off from the vessel; but there were left behind two or three hundred people, many of them gold-diggers, when the Central America went down. One who left the ship in one of the last boats which took the women, described what he saw in the cabin of the steamer when all hope was gone, and the great ship was about to go down. People took out their gold. One said, holding his leather bag, containing his long toiled for accumulations, "Here—take it who will! Take it who will. It is no more use to me—the ship is going down. Take it who will." Others took out their gold, and scattered it all over. "There," they said, "take it—take it who will! We are all going down. There is no more chance for us. The gold will do us no good!"

Oh, what a comment that is on the truly valueless nature of riches when a man draws near to God! "Riches profit not in the day of wrath—but righteousness delivers from death." (Prov. 11:4.) Think of your **folly**—your folly as well as your **danger**, your folly as well as your **guilt**—if you will cleave to your sins. Think of your folly, if you will not hear the warning which I give you this day. In my Master's name, I say to you once more, "Except you repent," you, even you who are reading this paper, "you shall likewise perish!"

(2) My second word of application shall be an **INVITATION** to all who feel their sins and desire to repent, and yet know not what to do. I give it broadly and fully to all who ask me, "What shall I do, this very day, if I am to take your advice?" I answer that question without any hesitation. I say to you, in my Master's name, Repent, Repent, Repent this very day. Repent without delay.

I feel no difficulty in saying this. I cannot agree with those who say that unconverted people should not be told to repent or pray. I find the Apostle Peter saying to Simon Magus, "Repent of this your wickedness." I find him saying, "pray to the Lord that the intent of your heart may be forgiven you." (Acts 8:22.) I am content to follow in the Apostle's wake. I say the same to everyone who is anxious about his soul. I say, Repent, Repent, Repent without delay. The time will soon come when you must be decided, if you ever mean to be. Why not this very day? Why not tonight? Sermon-hearing cannot go on forever. Going to churches and chapels must have an end. Liking this minister and liking that minister, belonging to this church and belonging to that chapel, holding these views and holding those views, thinking this preacher sound and that preacher unsound, is not enough to save a soul. A man must act at last, as well as think, if he means to go to heaven. A man must break off from his sins, and flee to the Lord Jesus, if he does not intend to be damned. A man must come out from the world, and take up the cross. A man must be decided, and repent, and believe. A man must show his colors, and be on the Lord

Jesus Christ's side, if he means to be saved. And why not begin all this today? Oh, Repent, Repent, Repent without delay!

Do you ask me again what you ought to do? Go, I tell you, and cry to the Lord Jesus Christ this very day. Go and pour out your heart before Him. Go and tell Him what you are—and tell Him what you desire. Tell Him you are a sinner—He will not be ashamed of you. Tell Him you want to be saved—He will hear you. Tell Him you are a poor weak creature—He will listen to you. Tell Him you do not know what to do or how to repent—He will give you His grace. He will pour out His Spirit upon you. He will hear you. He will grant your prayer. He will save your soul. There is enough in Christ, and to spare, for all the needs of all the world, for all the needs of every heart that is

unconverted, unsanctified, unbelieving, impenitent, and unrenewed.

“What is your hope?” said a man to a poor Welsh boy, who could not speak much English, and was found dying in an inn one day. “What is your hope about your soul?” What was his reply? He turned to the questioner, and said to him, in broken English, “Jesus Christ is plenty for everybody! Jesus Christ is plenty for everybody!” There was a mine of truth in those words. And well said another—a navigator who died in the Lord, “Tell them all, tell every man you meet—Christ is for every man! Jesus Christ is for every man!” Go to that Savior this day, and tell Him the needs of your soul. Go to Him, in the words of that beautiful hymn which says—

“Just as I am—without one plea,
But that Your blood was shed for me,
And that You bid me come to Thee—
O Lamb of God, I come!

“Just as I am—and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To You, whose blood can cleanse each spot—
O Lamb of God, I come!”

Go to the Lord Jesus in that spirit, and He will receive you. He will not refuse you. He will not despise you. He will grant you pardon, peace, everlasting life, and give you the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Do you ask me whether there is anything else you ought to do? Yes! I reply. Go and resolve to break off from every known sin. Let those who will call such advice legal—I trust I may never shrink from giving it. It never can be right to sit still in wickedness. It never can be wrong to say with Isaiah, “Cease to do evil.” (Isa. 1:16.) Whatever be your sin, resolve, by God's help, that tomorrow morning you will rise an altered man, and break off from that sin. Whether it be drinking or swearing, or passion, or lying, or cheating, or covetousness; whatever your sin and fault—determine, by God's grace, that you will break off immediately from it. Give it up without delay, and turn from it, by God's help, for the rest of your days. Cast it from you—it is a serpent that will bite you to death. Throw it from you—it is useless lumber; it will sink the ship down to perdition. Cast away your besetting sin—give it up—turn from it—break it off. By God's help resolve that in that respect you will sin no more.

But I think it just possible that some reader of this volume may be ashamed of repentance. I do beseech you to cast away such shame for ever. Never be ashamed of repentance toward God. Of sin you might be ashamed. Of lying, swearing, drunkenness, gambling—of these a man ought to be ashamed. But of repentance, of prayer, of faith in Christ, of seeking God, of caring for the soul—never, never, so long as you live, never be ashamed of such things as these. I remember, long ago, a thing that came under my own knowledge, which gave me some idea what the fear of man can do. I was attending a dying man, who had been a sergeant in the Guards. He had ruined his health by drinking liquor. He had been a careless, thoughtless man about his soul. He told me upon his death-bed, that when he first began to pray he was so ashamed of his wife knowing it, that when he went upstairs to pray he would take his shoes off and creep up in his stockings, that his wife might not be aware how he was spending his time. Verily, I am afraid there are many like him! Do not you be one of them. Whatever you are ashamed of, never be ashamed of seeking God.

But, I think it just possible that some reader of this volume is afraid to repent. You think you are so bad and unworthy that Christ will not have you. I do beseech you once more, to cast away such fear

forever. Never, never be afraid to repent. The Lord Jesus Christ is very gracious. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. Fear not to draw near to Him. There is a confessional ready for you. You need none made by man. The throne of grace is the true confessional. There is a Priest ready for you. You need no ordained man, no priest, no bishop, no minister, to stand between you and God. The Lord Jesus is the true High Priest. None is so wise, and none so loving as He. None but He can give you absolution, and send you away with a light heart and in perfect peace. Oh, take the invitation I bring you. Fear nothing. Christ is not an “austere man.” He “despises none.” (Job 36:5.) Arise this day, and flee to Him. Go to Christ and repent this night without delay.

(3) My last word of application shall be an **EXHORTATION** to all who have known what repentance is by experience. I address it to all who have, by God’s grace, felt their sins, sorrowed for their sins, confessed their sins, given up their sins, and found peace in the blood of Jesus Christ. What shall I say to you but this—Keep up your repentance! Keep up your repentance. Let it be a habit of mind you watch over to the last day of your life. Let it be a fire you never allow to burn low or to become dull. Keep up your repentance, if you love life.

I do not want you to make a Christ of repentance, or to turn it into a bondage for your soul. I do not bid you to measure the degree of your justification by your repentance, or to suppose that your sins are not forgiven because your repentance is imperfect. Justification is one thing, and repentance is another. You must not confuse things that differ. It is only faith that justifies. It is only faith that lays hold of Christ. But for all that, keep a jealous watch over your repentance. Keep it up—keep it up, and let not the fire burn low. Whenever you find a slackness coming over your soul—whenever you feel slow, and dull, and heavy, and cold, and careless about little sins—look to your own heart then, and take heed lest you fall. Say to your soul, “Oh, my soul, what are you doing? Have you forgotten David’s fall? Have you forgotten Peter’s backsliding? Have you forgotten David’s subsequent misery? Have you forgotten Peter’s tears? Awake, O my soul, awake once more. Heap on fuel, make the fire burn bright. Return again to your God, let your repentance once more be lively. Let your repentance be repented over again.” Alas, how few are the hours in a Christian’s best days when he does not “make work for repentance!”

Keep up your repentance until the last day of your life. There will always be sins to deplore, and infirmities to confess. Take them daily to the Lord Jesus Christ, and obtain from Him daily supplies of mercy and grace. Make confession daily to the great High Priest, and receive from Him daily absolution. Feed daily on the passover Lamb. But never forget that it was to be eaten with *bitter herbs*. “Sir,” said a young man to Philip Henry, “how long should a man go on repenting?” What did old Philip Henry reply? “Sir, I hope to carry my repentance to the very gates of heaven. Every day I find I am a sinner, and every day I need to repent. I mean to carry my repentance, by God’s help, up to the very gates of heaven.”

May this be our divinity, your divinity, my divinity; your theology, my theology! May repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ be the two great pillars before the temple of our religion, the corner-stones in our system of Christianity! (2 Chron. 3:17.) May the two never be disjoined! May we, while we repent, believe; and while we believe, repent! And may repentance and faith, faith and repentance—be ever uppermost, foremost, the chief and principal articles, in the creed of our souls!