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## REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE

Ἄρα καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ὁ θεὸς τὴν μετάνοιαν εἰς ζωὴν ἔδωκεν. Acts xi. 18.

### I

IN the New Testament Greek the word *μετάνοια* is the word habitually used to denote repentance unto life. This word in nineteen cases out of twenty, denotes a change of mind, the word mind being employed in the sense of *disposition, will, or inclination*, as in Romans vii. 25, "With the mind, I myself serve the law of God." And the *verb* regularly used in the sense of *to repent unto life* is *μετανοεῖν*, compounded of *μετὰ* (*after*) and *νοεῖν* (*to perceive, consider, understand*), the compound verb meaning *to change one's mind or purpose*, implying a change of feelings or heart. Since this change of heart, feelings, purpose, must express itself, the word, practically, includes in its meaning to change *correspondingly* the outward life; but the inward change is chiefly stressed. Of this inward change, it should also be remarked, grief is an accompaniment. While the word is naturally employed in classic Greek, at times, for a mere change of judgment, it nevertheless in all moral uses presupposes and implies grief for the sins of the past as an accompaniment of a change from the sinful to a better mode of life; and whenever this word *μετανοεῖν* is employed in the New Testament (unless we except Hebrews xii. 17), it is used of the change of mind from sin to holiness—a change no one will make who does not feel deep sorrow for the sins already committed and for the sinfulness of his heart. In all these New Testament uses sorrow is necessarily associated with the word, therefore. This phase of its New Testament meaning is shown also by the imagery of passages in which the word is found, e.g. in Luke x. 13, "They had repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes," that is, "They had repented long ago, sitting in the habiliments of grief." The historical meaning of the word *μετανοεῖν*, then, in the New Testament is to change from sin to holiness, with grief for one's past as sinful. The one exception seems to be Hebrews xii. 17, "He found no place for a change of mind" (in his father). In this place, *μετανοίας* does not appear clearly to have an ethical element. At any rate, here it may have mere mental denotation.

Some have supposed that another exception is found in Luke xvii. 3, 4, "If thy brother sin against thee seven times, and seven times turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him." Dr. Robert L. Dabney well says: "In this case μετανοεῖν is used for the professed repentance of an erring man, and even a very unstable brother, to show that his profession, so long as it is not absolutely discredited by his bad conduct, is to be taken by the judgment of charity as evidence of genuine Christian sorrow, so far as to secure forgiveness. A profession of mere casual sorrow would not entitle to it."<sup>1</sup>

The New Testament also occasionally uses the verb στρέφειν (and its compounds, in certain middle and passive forms) of repentance. Sometimes it unites μετανοεῖν and ἐπιστρέφειν in the same exhortation.

The word μεταμέλῃσθαι, occurs in the following passages in the New Testament: Matthew xxi. 29, 32; xxvii. 3; Romans xi. 29; 2 Corinthians vii. 8, 10; and is always translated *to repent*, even in the Revised Version, except in 2 Corinthians vii. 8, 10; but is incorrectly so translated. It means *to change one's feeling of care or concern*, to regret, not to repent unto life. This is disputed in regard to Matthew xxi. 32, "And ye, when ye saw it, did not μετεμελήθη that afterwards ye might believe on him." Here, too, the word should be given its ordinary sense—should be translated "did not feel regret." Some expositors, it is true, hold that the word, in this instance, is used of repentance unto life and do so on the ground that "it alone is vitally connected with saving faith"; but the ordinary meaning of the word gives to our Lord's statement more trenchancy. Give the word its ordinary meaning: Christ charges upon the obdurate priests such hardness that they felt not only no godly sorrow but not even that carnal sorrow which is often a precursor of true repentance and faith. Thus there appears to be no reason for taking the word in this passage in any other than its ordinary sense.<sup>2</sup> The Revised Version translates the words μεταμέλῃσθαι and μετανοεῖν with accurate discrimination in 2 Corinthians vii. 8-10: "For though I made you sorry with my epistle, I do not regret it; though I did regret it (for I see that that epistle made you sorry, though for a season). I now rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye were made sorry

<sup>1</sup> *Theology*, pp. 651-652.

<sup>2</sup> See Broadus: *Commentary on Matthew* in *loc. cit.*

after a godly sort, that ye might suffer loss by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, a repentance which bringeth no regret." Paul was discriminating. He made no intimation that true repentance can ever be the subject of repentance, though the necessity of giving them sorrow might be regretted.

In the Old Testament שׁוּב is the word which most nearly corresponds to μετανοεῖν. It is the great word with the prophets and emphasizes the element of *turning* from sin unto God. It is rather remarkable that the Hebrews did not use either תְּשׁוּבָה or תְּשׁוּבָה, of repentance; but that תְּשׁוּבָה is used by them in the sense of *revolt, turning from* the Lord.

The Old Testament uses נָחַם in the sense of *repent*, at times, and at times in the sense of *regret*. When this word is used the stress seems to be on the element of grief.

It thus appears that the New Testament exhortation to *repent unto life* is, in gist, like that of the prophet Joel ii. 12, 13, "Turn ye unto me with all your hearts, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto Jehovah your God"; like those of the prophets Isaiah lv. 7 and Ezekiel xxxiii. 11, 15. But the New Testament term μετανοεῖν, rendered *repent*, is more specific and more comprehensive in spiritual content than שׁוּב or נָחַם. It denotes in its historic meaning the inward change of the whole man with reference to sin and to God, and conveys, by implication, the idea of grief for past sin, and, by inference, that of the reform of the outward life, as well.

Great difficulty has been found in translating μετανοεῖν into other languages. Jerome, in the Latin Vulgate, endeavoured to translate it by *poenitentiam agere*; but the word *poenitentia* is on the same stem with *poena, penalty*. The etymology of *poenitentia* in the phrase *poenitentiam agere* implies that it means to *pay the penalty*: hence, naturally the Patristic period and the Middle Ages slid into the error known as penance. Lactantius had proposed a much better word by which to translate μετανοεῖν, viz. *resipiscentia*, but his suggestion had met with little appreciation.

Our English word *repent* is on the same stem with penance; and it is regrettable that we have not a word with a less misleading origin and history by which to translate μετανοεῖν. It is more

to be regretted, however, that our English versions have not universally rendered *μετανοεῖν* and *μεταμέλεισθαι* with discrimination, instead of at times confusing their meanings.

So far we have seen that the New Testament in English teaches of a repentance, which is a change of mind, purpose, feeling, heart—from sin to God, a change accompanied by grief for past and present sin, and hatred of it; and that it teaches also of a “repentance” which, according to the Greek, it should call “regret”—a pain naturally consequent on sin, arising in the natural heart, either with or without the common convincing operations of the Holy Spirit. This regret contains three elements: fear of the danger incurred, shame for the sin, and remorse or involuntary self-condemnation before the bar of conscience. It is a purely natural emotion, an emotion of the moral nature, implying a conscience, but compatible with an entire preference of the will for sin. It wants utterly the three elements of true repentance, viz. that of grief for and hatred of sin *as contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God*, that of turning from sin unto God, and endeavour after obedience to Him.

The phenomena of moral regret and the phenomena of repentance unto life are indeed to be compared only in their occasions, and in their subjective springs. The occasion of each is sin. *The springs of regret* are: (1) an apprehension that the soul that sinneth shall die, (2) an apprehension that sin is nasty and mean, and (3) an apprehension of our culpability. *The springs of repentance* are: (1) an apprehension in the light of God’s mercy that the soul that sinneth shall die, (2) an apprehension of the loathsomeness and heinousness of sin as contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God, and a personal loathing of it and grief for it, (3) a condemnation of conscience, reinforced by a genuine hatred of sin and admiration of God’s holiness. Repentance and regret should be sharply distinguished and constantly distinguished.<sup>1</sup>

Having endeavoured to get at the nature of repentance according to the teaching of Holy Scripture, let us now, in the second place, consider

<sup>1</sup> In the preparation of the foregoing statements we have built on the *Holy Scriptures*; Thayer: *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*; Edward Robinson: *Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament*; Tregelles: *Gessenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*; Broadus: *Commentary on Matthew* (on passages cited from Matthew); R. L. Dabney: *Syllabus and Notes on Systematic and Polemic Theology*, Lecture 55; John Dick: *Theology*, Lecture 70; A. A. Hodge: *Outlines of Theology*, Chap. 32; W. G. T. Shedd: *Theology*, Vol. 2, pp. 534-535; A. H. Strong: *Outlines of Theology*, pp. 220-224; Jeremy Taylor: *Works*, Vol. II, pp. 421-620; *et alia*.

II

*The Statements of the Doctrine of Repentance unto Life set forth in our Standards; their Propriety and the Psychological Statement of the Change.*

1. "Repentance unto life," says the *Shorter Westminster Catechism*, "is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavour after new obedience" (*Shorter Catechism*, Ques. 87). "By it a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filth and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God, and upon apprehension of His mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for and hates his sins as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavouring to walk with Him in all the ways of His commandments," says the *Confession of Faith*, Chap. XV, 2.

According to these statements, repentance consists of: (1) Grief and hatred of our sins. Cf. Psalm cxix. 128, "I hate every false way"; cxix. 136, "Streams of water run down mine eyes because they keep not thy law"; (2) An actual turning unto God from all sin; and (3) A sincere and persevering endeavour after new obedience (Acts xxvi. 20), "That they should repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance."

According to the same statements, the subjective springs of repentance are: (1) A consciousness of the guilt of sin, i.e. of exposure to merited punishment for it, which the justice of God demands (Psalm li. 4, 9), "Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done that which is evil in thy sight: that thou mayst be justified when thou speakest and be clear when thou judgest." "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities," (2) A consciousness of pollution as opposed to the holiness of God (Psalm li. 5, 7, 10), "Behold I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me." "Purify me with hyssop and I shall be clean, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me," (3) A consciousness of helplessness (Psalm li. 11), "Cast me not away from thy presence and take not thy holy Spirit from me"; and a bright apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ (Psalm li. 1).

2. The propriety of these doctrinal statements is manifest from the study just made of the words used in the original Scriptures to express repentance and from the Scriptures cited in connection with the analysis of the statements; but it may be well to adduce further proof that an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ is essential to evangelical repentance. Faith in Christ is a necessary motive to evangelical repentance: (1) "Because the awakened conscience echoes God's law and can be appeased by no less a propitiation than that demanded by divine justice itself, and until this is realized by application to Christ, either indifference must stupefy, or remorse must torment the soul." (2) "A sense of the amazing goodness of God to us in the gift of His Son, and of our ungrateful requital of it is necessary to excite in the repentant soul the proper shame and sorrow for our sins as committed against God" (Psalm li. 14), "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness." (3) "This is proved by teachings and examples furnished in Scripture" (Psalm li. 1; cxxx. 4), "There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared."

3. It has become clear that in repentance there is a threefold change in the soul: (1) A change of view—an intellectual change—so that sin is recognized as involving guilt, defilement and helplessness (Psalm li. 3), "I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me." (2) A change of feeling—an emotional change—so that there is grief for sin as opposed to the goodness, justice and holiness of God (Psalm li. 1, 2), and (3) A change of purpose—a voluntary change—a turning from sin to God in quest of pardon and cleansing (Psalm li. 7), "Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." Repentance is, therefore, a change of the whole man.<sup>1</sup>

### III

The change designated "repentance unto life," should be further distinguished by asking, "*What is Legal Repentance?*" *How are "Legal" and Evangelical Repentance related to Repentance*

<sup>1</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chap. XV; *Shorter Catechism*, Ques. 87; A. A. Hodge: *Commentary on the Confession of Faith*; comments in previously cited works by R. L. Dabney, A. A. Hodge, W. G. T. Shedd, A. H. Strong and W. A. Brown.

*unto Life ; and to one another ? And of what should we repent ?  
And how long should we continue the Exercise of Repentance ?*

1. "Legal Repentance" has been described by some theologians as flowing only from a sense of danger and fear of wrath, because of unbelief, and aversion to God and His holy Law, springing ordinarily from discouragement and despondency, "as temporary, and as producing only partial and external reformation."<sup>1</sup> When so defined it is only another name for what we have called "regret."

Other theologians (and among them Dr. R. L. Dabney) describe *legal repentance* as "genuine sorrow for sin, including both fear of its dangers and a consciousness of its wrongness, and loathing of its odiousness, with a thorough justifying and approving God's holy law ; a sorrow wrought by the Holy Ghost ; but wrought by Him only through the instrumentality of the convincing law and unaccompanied with conscious hopes of mercy in Christ," distinctly apprehended ; and a turning from sin unto God with endeavour after compliance with His will. In other words, they mean by "legal repentance" the *genuine repentance wrought by Old Testament instrumentalities, by the instrumentalities of the Legal Dispensation.*

By *evangelical repentance* these theologians mean, "that Godly sorrow for sin which is wrought by the renewing Spirit, including the acts of *legal repentance* as just described, but also and chiefly the tender sorrow combined with hopes of mercy proceeding from appropriating faith, when the believer 'looks on Him whom he hath pierced,' and sees there at once a blessed way of deliverance, and a new illustration of God's love, and his own aggravated vileness."<sup>2</sup> This distinction between the true repentance of the Old Testament saint and that of the New Testament saint, we accept as accurate ; and shall use the term "legal repentance" of the genuine Godly repentance of the Old Testament Dispensation.

2. In view of what has just been said, it is clear that "legal repentance" and "evangelical repentance" are related to one another and to repentance unto life as two species are related to one another and to their genus. They are severally true forms of

<sup>1</sup> Buck : *Theological Dictionary* ; Ridgley : *Divinity, Lecture 76* ; *The Popular and Critical Encyclopedia.*

<sup>2</sup> Dabney : *ut supra*, p. 654.

repentance unto life. The one was characteristic of the Old Testament. The other is characteristic of the New Testament Dispensation.

3. The *Confession of Faith* (Chap. XV, sec. 5) says, "Men ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every man's duty to repent of his particular sins, particularly." So the Scriptures teach in Daniel ix., Nehemiah ix., Psalm xix. 12, Luke xix. 8, 1 Timothy i. 13-15. The *Larger Catechism* (Ques. 76) represents repentance as including turning from all sins unto God. And the *Shorter Catechism* (Ques. 87) represents it as turning from all sin unto God. So the Scriptures teach in Acts xxvi. 18, 1 Kings viii. 47, 48, Acts ii. 37, Psalm li. 7.

Put together, these passages from the Standards bring out the truth: Every man ought to repent of sin as such, of all sins, of particular sins and of his besetting sins; just as he should strive for virtue as such, for all virtues, for particular virtues, and for those virtues in which he is specially deficient, or stands in special need of. (So De Moor.) If he is to further his sanctification as he ought he must repent of sins of deed, word, thought, feeling—sin in conduct of every sort and sins in character. Hence every conscious, and especially every conscious and recent transgression, should be made the subject of particular repentance; and with reference to any unconscious, or forgotten, transgression, to which we cannot advert by reason of the limitation of our faculties, we should each remember that he has such sins, grieve over the fact that he has them, praying meanwhile that his vision of the right and the wrong may grow clearer.

The student has seen that in teaching that sin of nature has to be repented of, the Bible teaches that our native depravity—a principal element in original sin—must be repented of; and may ask: Must I repent too of the guilt of Adam's first sin? In answer, it must be said that only as he recognizes himself as having been in our first parents in whom the whole human race then was can he repent of Adam's first sin or of its guilt. If he regard himself as sustaining a mere federal relation to Adam he may merely regret that first sin and therefore its guilt. Of course he must repent of his native depravity, inherited though it be.

4. After this description of repentance unto life, it is manifest that it is not only an exercise that is to be performed at

the beginning of conversion but one to be kept up as long as we sin, or remain sinful. It should become keener with the growing clarity of view of the heinousness of our sins of act and our sin of nature—a life-long exercise.<sup>1</sup>

IV

Let us ask, *Who is the Author of Repentance? And Does it Follow, or Precede Regeneration?*

1. In answer to the former of these questions remark:  
 (a) Were we to confound repentance with regret we might ascribe repentance (wrongly) to the unaided workings of the human heart. The natural man is amply capable of regret.  
 (b) Were the Pelagian view of human nature correct—the view that human nature has full power to do good—we might ascribe repentance exclusively to man's own volition; but the Pelagian view of human nature is superficial and not accordant with fact.  
 (c) From the nature of repentance itself taken in connection with the native character of man, and from plain Scriptural teaching, it is evident that God is the author of repentance.  
 (1) From the nature of repentance itself, since its subjective springs are a sense of the odiousness of sin, a sense of the beauty of holiness and an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ. It therefore involves faith, which is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians v. 22), and God's gift (Ephesians ii. 8). (2) From the plain assertions of Scripture: Acts v. 31, "Him did God exalt with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins"; Acts xi. 18, "And when they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God, saying, Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life"; 2 Timothy ii. 25, "In meekness correcting them that oppose themselves if peradventure God may give them repentance unto the knowledge of the truth"; Zechariah xii. 10, "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplication; and they shall look upon him whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born"; Ezekiel xi. 19, "And I will give them one heart,

<sup>1</sup> R. L. Dabney: *Ibidem*; A. A. Hodge: *Outlines of Theology*, p. 489; Ridgley: *Divinity*, Vol. C, pp. 167ff; Calvin: *Institutes*, Book III, Chap. III.

and I will put a new spirit within you, and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and I will give them a heart of flesh ; that they may walk in my statutes and keep mine ordinances ” ; Jeremiah xxxi. 18, “ Turn thou me, and I shall be turned.” See also Psalms lxxx. 3, 7, 19 ; lxxxv. 4.

These texts cannot be evaded by saying that God is the author of repentance only mediately—by teaching the Gospel which invites and commands repentance. In some of these Scriptures persons already in possession of Gospel means, pray to God to work repentance in them ; and in 2 Timothy ii. 25 there is a “ peradventure ” whether God will give repentance to those to whom Timothy is to give the truth, showing that repentance was a separate grace that might or might not be given on occasion of the giving of the Gospel.

Nor can these texts be evaded by the teaching of Theodore Haering, who seems (*Theology*, pp. 647 *et seq.*) to hold that repentance, which he represents as an element of faith, is mysteriously effected within us by the example of Christ—by his perfect but merely human attitude to God. According to these Scriptures Christ’s example can be nothing more than the occasion of the gift, and a stimulus to its growth once it has been wrought.

2. The Arminians teach, on the one hand, that repentance is the work of the Holy Ghost and, on the other, that it is wrought before regeneration, as they also hold of faith and justification. “ Their reasons are two : First, that we are taught (Psalm li. 10) to pray for regeneration ; but that prayer to be acceptable must be sincere ; and that a sincere request for a holy heart implies or presupposes repentance for ungodliness. Second, that repentance must be presupposed in faith, since to fly to Christ as a refuge from sin presupposes a sense of sin ; that faith is a condition of justification ; and that justification must precede regeneration, since God cannot be supposed to bestow the beginning of life in Him—communion with Him—the beginning of eternal life—on a rebel as yet unreconciled to Him. They point to the seventh chapter of Romans, and say : ‘ We have in this chapter down through the twenty-third verse, a description of repentance ; have in verses 24 and 25 an exposition of the dawning of saving faith, have in Romans viii. 1, the first clause, the justification consequent on faith, and in the last clause (of viii. 1) an exposition of the beginning of spiritual life.’ ”

These objections are invalid :

1st. The plausibility of each is due, for the most part, to the oversight of the fact that the priority of one over another of these several steps is only that of causation, and not of time. Everyone who is regenerated is, in the same moment, in principle repentant, believing and justified. " Since all are parts of God's grace, is it not foolish to say that His righteousness or His wrath forbids Him to bestow this before that, since His grace permits neither to precede in time and none to be lacking ? "

2nd. The objection that sincere prayer for regeneration cannot be made prior to repentance, that we are commanded so to pray, that therefore repentance must be prior to regeneration, is countered by an equally grave objection to their view that repentance precedes regeneration : How can a man prevalently ungodly—totally depraved—exercise genuine repentance, godly sorrow for sin and endeavour after new obedience, and so pray for regeneration while still unregenerate ? No true spiritual desire can exist till God has renewed the will. The Arminian should remember that if God must give repentance that he, an unregenerate man, may pray sincerely for a regenerate heart, He must also give regeneration that his repentance be no sham.

It should be remarked, too, that the Scripture on which the Arminian seems to rely for his view that the unregenerate man may make an acceptable prayer for regeneration, Psalm li. 10, is not relevant ; since it is the prayer of a regenerate man. Such David was before he cried : " Create in me a clean heart." His prayer was for a renewal. One who has spiritual life in any degree may pray for spiritual life ; but one who is spiritually dead will not do it. Yet it is proper for God to command the spiritually dead to pray for spiritual life. He ought to desire it, ought to struggle for it. Spiritual ability is not the measure of spiritual obligation.

3rd. " The objection that God will not give spiritual life, while unreconciled, to us till we have been justified, may be countered by objecting to their scheme : God will not bestow the essential gifts of faith and repentance, to which eternal blessedness is tied by the Gospel, before bestowing life—communion with Him. . . . Must not the Arminian just as much as the Calvinist, fall back for his solution of these difficulties,

upon the glorious fact that Christ hath deserved all these saving gifts for His people? To him who believes the doctrine of unconditional election, there is no difficulty here; because he believes that these saving gifts are all pledged to be given to the believing sinner, not merely before he fulfils any instrumental conditions, but before he is born. There is no difficulty in it all to God; because all is of grace" (Dabney, *ut citato supra*).<sup>1</sup>

Because of more or less confusion in the minds of certain very eminent Calvinistic thinkers on the relations of faith and repentance, we should ask:

## V

*What are the Relations of Faith and Repentance? Of Faith and Repentance to Regeneration? Of Faith and Repentance to Conversion? Of Repentance to Justification?*

I. Calvinistic theologians have divided on the question: "Which causally precedes the other, faith or repentance?" Calvin and, perhaps, the majority of Calvinistic theologians have maintained that "repentance not only immediately follows faith, but is produced by it." He says, again: "When we speak of faith as the origin of repentance, we dream not of any space of time which it employs in producing it; but we intend to signify that a man cannot truly devote himself to repentance unless he knows himself to be of God." He adds that this only becomes known by appropriating faith. Dr. Shedd states and argues the same position in the following paragraph: "Though faith and repentance are inseparable and simultaneous, yet in the order of nature, faith precedes repentance. Zechariah xii. 10, 'They shall look on him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for an only son.' Acts xi. 21, 'A great number believed and turned unto the Lord.' This order is evinced by the following particulars: (a) Faith is the means and repentance is the end. Faith leads to repentance and not repentance to faith. The Scriptures present God's mercy in redemption as the motive to repentance. Jeremiah iii. 14, 'Turn

<sup>1</sup> The section just closed was worked up in view of the following literature: Dabney: *Theology ut supra*; Ridgley: *Divinity*, Vol. 3, 167; Clarke: *An Outline of Theology*, pp. 401-402; W. A. Brown: *Christian Theology in Outline*, pp. 390 ff; Haering: *Theology*, pp. 644-650; Watson: *Theological Institutes*, Chap. 24; Strong: *ut supra*, p. 221; Doctrinal Standards of Presbyterian Church in U.S.; The Holy Scriptures.

O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you.' Joel ii. 13, 'Turn unto the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful.' (b) Repentance involves turning to God; but there can be no turning but through Christ. John xiv. 6, 'No man cometh unto God but by me.' John x. 9, 'I am the door.' (c) If repentance precede faith, then it stands between the sinner and Christ. The sinner cannot go to Christ 'just as he is,' but first must make certain that he has repented. (d) If repentance precedes faith, then none but the penitent man is invited to believe in Christ. This contradicts Romans v. 6, 'Christ died for the ungodly.' Impenitent sinners are commanded to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to the remission of their sins. (e) The doctrine that repentance precedes faith tends to make faith legal, that is, a reason why Christ should accept the sinner. (f) God out of Christ, and irrespective of faith in Christ, is a consuming fire, Deuteronomy iv. 24; Hebrews xii. 29. It is impossible to have godly sorrow with this view of God. Only remorse and terror are possible. In such passages as Mark i. 15, 'Repent ye and believe the Gospel,' and Acts xx. 20, 'Testifying repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ,' the end is mentioned first and the means last. In a proposition, a term may have a position verbally which it has not logically. In Jeremiah xxxi. 34, sanctification is mentioned before pardon. 'They shall know me, for I will forgive their iniquity.'" (Shedd: *Dogmatic Theology*, II, pp. 536-537.)

Dr. Dabney, while insisting just as strongly that faith and repentance are chronologically simultaneous, holds that "the very first activity of faith implies some repentance as the prompter thereof," that "the man begins to believe because he has also begun to repent."

His reasons are: "First, the other view gives a degrading and mercenary character to repentance; as though the sinner selfishly conditioned his willingness to feel aught concerning his sin on the previous assurance of impunity. It is as though the condemned felon should say: Let me go free, and I will sincerely avow that I have done very wrong. But if I am to swing for it, I will neither acknowledge my guilt, nor say, 'God bless my country.' Is this ingenuous repentance? No; its language is: Psalm li. 4, 5, 'Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when

thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.'

“ ‘Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,  
I must pronounce thee just in death;  
And if my soul is sent to hell,  
Thy righteous law approves it well.’

“*Second*, Godly sorrow for sin must be presupposed, or implied, in the first actings of faith, because faith embraces Christ as Saviour from sin. (See *Cat.*, Ques. 86, last clause especially.) Surely the Scriptures do not present Christ to our faith only, or even mainly, as a way of impunity. See Matthew i. 21, Acts iii. 26, ‘Unto you first God, having raised his servant, sent him to bless you, in turning every one of you from your iniquities’; Titus ii. 14, ‘who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works.’ As we have pointed out, the most characteristic defect of a dead faith is that it would quite heartily embrace Christ as God’s provision for impunity in sin; but God offers Him to faith for a very different purpose, viz. : for restoration to holiness, including immunity from wrath as one of the secondary consequences thereof. But now a man does not flee from an evil, except as a consequence of feeling it an evil. Hence there can be no embracing Christ with the heart as a whole present Saviour, unless sin be felt in itself a present evil; and there be a genuine desire to avoid it as well as its penalty. . . .

“*Third*, some passages of Scripture imply that (in the order of production, repentance precedes faith); and I am not aware of any that contradict it. Mark i. 15, ‘Repent ye, and believe the Gospel’; Acts ii. 38, ‘Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins’; Acts v. 31, ‘Him doth God exalt with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins’; Acts xx. 21, ‘Testifying repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ’; 2 Timothy ii. 25, ‘In meekness instructing them that oppose themselves; if peradventure God may give them repentance to the knowledge of the truth.’ Especially this last text implies this order.” (Dabney: *Theology*, pp. 657-658.)

These arguments are each inconclusive. To get at the truth, observe, (a) Dr. Dabney and Dr. Shedd, alike, accept the Scriptural definitions of faith and repentance as given in the

Westminster Standards, e.g. in the *Shorter Catechism*, Questions 86, 87: and these definitions logically inhibit them from concluding that either grace is the necessary logical or causal antecedent of the other, in a sense which cannot be affirmed of the other. According to these definitions faith has involved in it repentance; and repentance has involved in it faith. According to these definitions each grace is related causally to the other as the other to it. They are like the Siamese twins, when one comes the other comes; and they come because of an identical parentage. They come like the back and front of the head of a child. They are extruded together. They have as their cause (subjective to man) the regenerate nature. When God has begotten the soul to spiritual life—regenerated it—it functions in an exercise with two aspects—one of these aspects being faith and the other being repentance. (b) A distinction should be made between incipient faith and incipient repentance on the one hand, and a developing faith and a developing repentance on the other hand. The capacities for faith and repentance in their incipient stages come together. But both faith and repentance are life-long and grow; and as they grow each affects the other causally. A growing repentance opens the mind and heart for the expansion of faith, stimulates that expansion, and a growing faith quickens repentance. To a repenting David the mercy of God appears more glorious, and trust in that mercy is stimulated. To a believing Paul, sins—his own sins appear more heinous with every new increase of his vision of the grace of God. (c) When we speak of consciousness as to whether repentance or faith acts first, after the new birth, the answer is decided by the object to which the soul is directed first after the new birth. If the object of its first regenerate look be its own ungodliness, the exercise of repentance is noted first by consciousness; “but just so surely as the volition is potentially in the preponderating motive, so surely has that soul looked from its ungodliness to Christ, the remedy of it; it may be unconsciously at first, but in due time, consciously.” If, on the other hand, the object of the first regenerate look be Christ, the exercise of faith is noted first by consciousness, but it is a faith which receives Christ as a Saviour from sin. The exercise of faith had involved in it an element which consciousness soon distinguishes as repentance.

2. The relation of faith and repentance to regeneration has already been indicated. Regeneration, which is the consequence

in man of God's quickening touch, *is* that change in his inclinations—in his heart—which prompts faith and repentance. When the sinner has been regenerated—been begotten again—he acts in accord with his new nature—as prompted by his new inclinations—his new motives. The new nature acts—expresses itself in distinctive exercises, and those exercises are faith and repentance. The regenerated nature becomes the subjective cause of faith and repentance.

3. Here we should ask: What is the relation of repentance to Conversion? Conversion is man's response to God's quickening—regenerating work. The relation of repentance and its twin grace, faith, to conversion is that of parts to the whole. Faith and repentance are man's converting acts and attitudes. Conversion is that change in life corresponding to the change in the nature of the sinner who has been regenerated—who has been made alive in Christ by the mighty re-creative power of the Holy Spirit.

But it may be proper to remark that the term conversion is popularly used to designate only the first actings of the new nature, at the commencement of a religious life, *or* the first steps of a return to God after a notable backsliding. Luke xxii. 32, "I have made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not; and do thou, when thou art converted, establish thy brethren." Repentance, however, is a daily experience in Christian living as long as the struggle with sin continues in heart and life. Psalm xix. 12, 13, "Who can discern his errors? Cleanse thou me from hidden faults. Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me. Then shall I be upright and be clear from the great transgression." Galatians v. 24, "And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof." Colossians iii. 6ff, "Put to death therefore your members which are upon the earth," *et cetera*.

4. Repentance is essential to justification, but not the instrument of justification. The sinner is not justified through repentance but through faith, which is the embracing act whereby union with Christ is instrumentally effected, and gratuitous salvation becomes sure. That it is necessary in the sense that no one can expect justification without it, is evident from the following facts: (1) The giving of justification to an unrepentant sinner "would be in effect to sanction his sin, to

confirm him in his sinful state, and to encourage others therein.”  
 (2) Repentance is involved in faith. Faith cannot be exercised save as repentance is exercised, any more than repentance be exercised save as faith is exercised. (3) The design of Christ’s work is to save His people from their sins. He will not grant justification except to him who hates his sin and turns from it. God must have some practical assurance in the sinner’s prevailing motives against his going on in sin. This, of course, does not argue that repentance is atoning, that it is any ground of justification, or that it is even instrumentally efficient toward justification apart from its element apprehensive of God’s mercy in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

VI

Let us *State and Refute the opinion of the Unitarians, the Advocates of the Moral Influence Theory of the Atonement and Rationalists generally, as to whether Repentance is a ground of Justification.*

1. They hold in common that the repentance of the sinner is the only satisfaction which the law requires, and, therefore, the only condition God demands as the prerequisite to full pardon and restoration to divine favour. They so hold apparently because : (a) Of the obstinate delusion of the carnal mind, under the power of which men often hold that they should be pardoned because they have repented. (b) Of their mistaking God’s determination, revealed in the Scriptures, that no impenitent person should be pardoned, for quite another thing, viz. : His teaching that repentance is a satisfaction for outraged law. This latter He does not teach.

2. Against this view remark : (a) *The law* demands perfect and perpetual obedience. Repentance is not obedience. (b) *Repentance* is no reparation for past disobedience. It in itself has no relevancy to repairing the mischief the sin has inflicted. Thus men judge. They say to those who have injured them : Your repentance is proper ; but it cannot recall the past ; nor undo that which was done. (c) Repentance is grief and hatred of sin, a turning from it unto God with endeavour after new obedience : its language is confession with reference to the past and present—a promise and determination Godward with

<sup>1</sup> A. A. Hodge : *Commentary on the Confession of Faith*, p. 292 ; Dabney : *ibidem* ; Watson : *ibidem* ; Shedd : *Dogmatic Theology*, II, pp. 536-537.

reference to the future. In part it is a confession of guilt, in part a confession of pollution. A man cannot pay the penalty due to his sin—cannot free himself of guilt—by confessing it. No man can pay a just debt by confessing its justice. Nor can the acknowledgment that one is polluted and guilty cleanse of guilt and pollution. Nor can good behaviour for the future remove that guilt. Were perfect behaviour for the future possible it would be no more than what the law requires for the future. Now it is precisely guilt from which the sinner is freed in justification. Hence as no element of repentance frees from guilt, no element of repentance can serve as the ground of justification.

(d) *Repentance* after transgression is a work. Hence justification on the ground of repentance would be justification by works; such a doctrine is rendered impossible by Scripture. Romans iii. 28, “We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.”

(e) *Repentance* is as much a gift of God (Acts v. 31) as the remission which it is supposed to purchase. This settles the matter unless these Rationalists can show that God has agreed to receive repentance as the ground of pardon—a thing which they will find hard to do.

(f) The Scriptures teach that the believer is justified solely on the ground of the righteousness of Christ imputed to him and received by faith alone; that Christ has rendered a full satisfaction in behalf of all who with true faith believe on Him.

We maintain therefore that, while the impenitent cannot be pardoned, repentance is not the ground of pardon—not the ground even in part.<sup>1</sup>

The Scriptural Doctrine of Repentance may be further distinguished by contrasting it even briefly with *Penance*. Accordingly, let us

## VII

*Expound Romish Doctrine of Penance; and show its Falsity.*

Rome substituted for the Scriptural doctrine of *repentance unto life* a doctrine which she calls *Penance*. She distinguishes penance as (1) a virtue, which is internal and includes sorrow for sin and a turning from it unto God; and (2) a sacrament

Compare Dabney: *ut supra*; and Shedd: *Theology*, II, pp. 392ff.

which is the external expression of the internal state. She magnifies this "sacrament" as the one means of recovery from a fall from a state of grace. This sacrament, she teaches, consists of (a) "contrition, i.e. sorrow and detestation of past sins, with a purpose of sinning no more (this is the virtue); (b) confession, or self-accusation, to a priest having jurisdiction and the power of the *keys*; (c) *satisfaction*, or some painful work, imposed by a priest, and performed by the penitent, to satisfy divine justice for sins committed subsequently to baptism; and (d) *absolution*, pronounced by the priest judicially and not merely declaratively. They hold that the element of satisfaction included in this sacrament makes a real satisfaction for sin and is an efficient cause of pardon, absolutely essential—the only means whereby the pardon of sins committed after baptism can be secured." Rome excludes from contrition (the only element in penance properly belonging to repentance) all sorrow for sin of nature; and some of her theologians allow *attrition*, or natural regret, to be substituted for *contrition* "without the vitiating of the sacrament."

The falsity of this doctrine is evident from the following considerations: 1st. It is not a sacrament, since it was not instituted by Christ; and since it does not signify, seal, or convey the benefits of Christ and the new covenant (*Cf. Dabney's Theology*, p. 753). 2nd. There is no Scriptural warrant for auricular confession. Scripture knows no special priest in the New Testament dispensation to whom confession can be made. Every true believer in this dispensation is a metaphorical priest. Believers at times may confess to one another; and are to confess everything immediately to God. 1 Timothy ii. 5, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and man—the man Christ Jesus." 1 John i. 9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 3rd. The doctrine of judicial priestly absolution is at once unscriptural and impious. The power of absolute forgiveness by a mere creature priest is incommunicable in itself. 4th. There is no Scriptural warrant for the element of *satisfaction*. It does dishonour to the perfect sacrifice offered once for all by our great High Priest. Hebrews x. 10-14, "By the which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all . . ." "For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified."

The distinction between temporal punishment due to sin and eternal punishment due to sin is unwarranted by God's word. The penalty of sin is God's *judicial* wrath. While that lasts there is no peace. When it is satisfied there is no more condemnation. Romans viii. 1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." The temporal sufferings of believers are not penalties but chastisements. The self-imposed *satisfactions*—painful works—are so much will-worship which God despises, Colossians ii. 20-23. 5th. It belittles the element of contrition—which is the only element which is even of the nature of repentance.<sup>1</sup> Thus Rome's doctrine of penance—is false and pernicious.

Let us consider last,

### VIII

#### *The Evidences and Fruits of Repentance unto Life.*<sup>2</sup>

The Scriptures command us to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance." They command, in a word, holy living—holy aspirations, holy activities, a holy life. "For repentance includes turning unto God with full purpose of and endeavour after new obedience; but there are certain acts dictated by repentance—acts which proceed immediately from the attitude of penitence":

1. Sincere repentance must lead to confession. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," Proverbs xxviii. 13. The highest form of this act is the confession of *all* our sins to God in secret prayer. True repentance will always thus utter itself to Him. The next highest form of this act is, if some of our sins have scandalized the Church, to make public confession of those sins before the Church. A third form of the duty is, if a sin of ours has been immediately against our neighbour, and if that sin is known to him, to confess it to him. See Luke xviii. 13, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Matthew v. 23, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee—first be reconciled to thy brother, then" *et cet.*

2. Sincere repentance must prompt us to make reparation for the damage done by our sin wherever reparation is possible.

<sup>1</sup> Cat. Rom., Part II, Chap. V, Ques. 12, 13; A. A. Hodge: *Outlines of Theology*, pp. 570, *et seq.*; A. A. Hodge: *Commentary on Confession of Faith*, p. 291; A. H. Strong: *Outlines of Theology*, p. 220.

<sup>2</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chap. XVI; Dabney: *Theology*, *ut supra*.

He who truly repents wishes his sin and its injurious results undone ; and if he truly wishes it and its consequences undone he will do all in his power to undo them. See Luke xix. 8, " If I have wrongfully exacted aught of any man, I restore unto him fourfold."

3. Sincere repentance must also prompt to watchfulness against the recurrence of that sin, and all sins, and to full conformity with all the holy law of God. 2 Corinthians vii. 11, " For behold, this self-same thing, that ye were made sorry after a godly sort, what earnest care it wrought among you, yea what clearing of yourselves, yea what indignation, yea what fear, yea what zeal, yea what avenging."

Repentance is *insufficiently preached*. " Repentance unto life is an Evangelical grace, the doctrine whereof is to be preached by every minister of the Gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ " (*Westminster Confession*, Chap. XV, 1).

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