The Doctrine of Repentance



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The Doctrine of Repentance

by

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1. Counterfeit Repentance

To discover what true repentance is, I shall first show what it is not. There are several deceits of repentance which might occasion that saying of Augustine that `repentance damns many'. He meant a false repentance; a person may delude himself with counterfeit repentance.

1. The first deceit of repentance is legal terror:

A man has gone on long in sin. At last God arrests him, shows him what desperate hazard he has run, and he is filled with anguish. Within a while the tempest of conscience is blown over, and he is quiet. Then he concludes that he is a true penitent because he has felt some bitterness in sin. Do not be deceived: this is not repentance. Ahab and Judas had some trouble of mind. It is one thing to be a terrified sinner and another to be a repenting sinner. Sense of guilt is enough to breed terror. Infusion of grace breeds repentance. If pain and trouble were sufficient to repentance, then the damned in hell should be most penitent, for they are most in anguish. Repentance depends upon a change of heart. There may be terror, yet with no change of heart.

2. Another deceit about repentance is resolution against sin:

A person may purpose and make vows, yet be no penitent. `Thou saidst, I will not transgress' (Jer. 2.20). Here was a resolution; but see what follows: ùnder every green tree thou wanderest, playing the harlot'. Notwithstanding her solemn engagements, she played fast and loose with God and ran after her idols. We see by experience what protestations a person will make when he is on his sick-bed, if God should recover him again; yet he is as bad as ever. He shows his old heart in a new temptation.

Resolutions against sin may arise:

(1) From present extremity; not because sin is sinful, but because it is painful. This resolution will vanish.

(2) From fear of future evil, an apprehension of death and hell: Ì looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him' (Rev. 6.8). What will not a sinner do, what vows will he not make, when he knows he must die and stand before the judgment-seat? Selflove raises a sick-bed vow, and love of sin will prevail against it. Trust not to a passionate resolution; it is raised in a storm and will die in a calm.

3. The third deceit about repentance is the leaving of many sinful ways:

It is a great matter, I confess, to leave sin. So dear is sin to a man that he will rather part with a child than with a lust: `Shall I give the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?' (Mic. 6.7). Sin may be parted with, yet without repentance.

(1) A man may part with some sins and keep others, as Herod reformed many things that were amiss but could not leave his incest.

(2) An old sin may be left in order to entertain a new, as you put off an old servant to take another. This is to exchange a sin. Sin may be exchanged and the heart remained unchanged. He who was a prodigal in his youth turns usurer in his old age. A slave is sold to a Jew; the Jew sells him to a Turk. Here the master is changed, but he is a slave still. So a man moves from one vice to another but remains a sinner still.

(3) A sin may be left not so much from strength of grace as from reasons of prudence. A man sees that though such a sin be for his pleasure, yet it is not for his interest. It will eclipse his credit, prejudice his health, impair his estate. Therefore, for prudential reasons, he dismisses it. True leaving of sin is when the acts of sin cease from the infusion of a principle of grace, as the air ceases to be dark from the infusion of light.

2. The Nature of True Repentance (1)

Ingredient I: Sight of Sin

The first part of Christ's physic is eye-salve (Acts 26.18). It is the great thing noted in the prodigal's repentance: `he came to himself' (Luke 15.17). He saw himself a sinner and nothing but a sinner. Before a man can come to Christ he must first come to himself. Solomon, in his description of repentance, considers this as the first ingredient: ìf they shall bethink themselves' (1 Kings 8.47). A man must first recognize and consider what his sin is, and know the plague of his heart before he can be duly humbled for it. The first creature God made was light. So the first thing in a penitent is illumination: `Now ye are light in the Lord' (Eph. 5.8). The eye is made both for seeing and weeping. Sin must first be seen before it can be wept for.

Hence I infer that where there is no sight of sin, there can be no repentance. Many who can spy faults in others see none in themselves. They cry that they have good hearts. Is it not strange that two should live together, and eat and drink together, yet not know each other? Such is the case of a sinner. His body and soul live together, work together, yet he is unacquainted with himself. He knows not his own heart, nor what a hell he carries about him. Under a veil a deformed face is hid. Persons are veiled over with ignorance and self-love; therefore they see not what deformed souls they have. The devil does with them as the falconer with the hawk. He blinds them and carries them hooded to hell: `the sword shall be upon his right eye' (Zech. 11.17). Men have insight enough into worldly matters, but the eye of their mind is smitten. They do not see any evil in sin; the sword is upon their right eye.

Ingredient 2: Sorrow for Sin

I will be sorry for my sin (Psalm 38.18)

Ambrose calls sorrow the embittering of the soul. The Hebrew word `to be sorrowful' signifies `to have the soul, as it were, crucified'. This must be in true repentance: `They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn' (Zech. 12.10), as if they did feel the nails of the cross sticking in their sides. A woman may as well expect to have a child without pangs as one can have repentance without sorrow. He that can believe without doubting, suspect his faith; and he that can repent without sorrowing, suspect his repentance.

Martyrs shed blood for Christ, and penitents shed tears for sin: `she stood at Jesus' feet

weeping' (Luke 7.3 8). See how this limbeck1 dropped. The sorrow of her heart ran out at her eye. The brazen laver for the priests to wash in (Exod. 30.18) typified a double laver: the laver of Christ's blood we must wash in by faith, and the laver of tears we must wash in by repentance. A true penitent labours to work his heart into a sorrowing frame. He blesses God when he can weep; he is glad of a rainy day, for he knows that it is a repentance he will have no cause to repent of. Though the bread of sorrow be bitter to the taste, yet it strengthens the heart (Ps. 104.15; 2 Cor. 7.10).

This sorrow for sin is not superficial: it is a holy agony. It is called in scripture a breaking of the heart: `The sacrifices of God are a broken and a contrite heart' (Ps. 51.17); and a rending of the heart: `Rend your heart' (Joel 2.13). The expressions of smiting on the thigh (Jer. 31.19), beating on the breast (Luke 18.13), putting on of sackcloth (Isa. 22.12), plucking off the hair (Ezra 9.3), all these are but outward signs of inward sorrow. This sorrow is:

(1) To make Christ precious. O how desirable is a Saviour to a troubled soul! Now Christ is Christ indeed, and mercy is mercy indeed. Until the heart is full of compunction it is not fit for Christ. How welcome is a surgeon to a man who is bleeding from his wounds!

(2) To drive out sin. Sin breeds sorrow, and sorrow kills sin. Holy sorrow is the rhubarb to purge out the ill humours of the soul. It is said that the tears of vine-branches are good to cure the leprosy. Certainly the tears that drop from the penitent are good to cure the leprosy of sin. The salt water of tears kills the worm of conscience.

(3) To make way for solid comfort: `They that sow in tears shall reap in joy'

(Ps. 126.5). The penitent has a wet seed-time but a delicious harvest. Repentance breaks the abscess of sin, and then the soul is at ease. Hannah, after weeping, went away and was no more sad (i Sam. 1.18). God's troubling of the soul for sin is like the angel's troubling of the pool (John 5.4), which made way for healing.

But not all sorrow evidences true repentance. There is as much difference between true and false sorrow as between water in the spring, which is sweet, and water in the sea, which is briny. The apostle speaks of sorrowing àfter a godly manner' (2 Cor. 7.9). But what is this godly sorrowing? There are six qualifications of it:

I. True godly sorrow is inward

It is inward in two ways:

(1) It is a sorrow of the heart. The sorrow of hypocrites lies in their faces:

`they disfigure their faces' (Matt. 6.16). They make a sour face, but their sorrow goes no further, like the dew that wets the leaf but does not soak to the root. Ahab's repentance was in outward show. His garments were rent but not his spirit (1 Kings 21.27). Godly sorrow goes deep, like a vein which bleeds inwardly. The heart bleeds for sin: `they were pricked in their heart'

(Acts 2.37). As the heart bears a chief part in sinning, so it must in sorrowing.

(2) It is a sorrow for heart-sins, the first outbreaks and risings of sin. Paul grieved for the law in his members (Rom. 7.23). The true mourner weeps for the stirrings of pride and concupiscence. He grieves for the `root of bitterness'

even though it never blossoms into act. A wicked man may be troubled for scandalous sins; a real convert laments heart-sins.

2. Godly sorrow is ingenuous

It is sorrow for the offence rather than for the punishment. God's law has been infringed, his love abused. This melts the soul in tears. A man may be sorry, yet not repent, as a thief is sorry when he is taken, not because he stole, but because he has to pay the penalty. Hypocrites grieve only for the bitter consequence of sin. I have read of a fountain that only sends forth streams on the evening before a famine. Likewise their eyes never pour out tears except when God's judgments are approaching. Pharaoh was more troubled for the frogs and river of blood than for his sin. Godly sorrow, however, is chiefly for the trespass against God, so that even if there were no conscience to smite, no devil to accuse, no hell to punish, yet the soul would still be grieved because of the prejudice done to God. `My sin is ever before me' (Ps. 51.3); David does not say, The sword threatened is ever before me, but `my sin'. O

that I should offend so good a God, that I should grieve my Comforter! This breaks my heart!

Godly sorrow shows itself to be ingenuous because when a Christian knows that he is out of the gun-shot of hell and shall never be damned, yet still he grieves for sinning against that free grace which has pardoned him.

3. Godly sorrow is fiducial2 It is intermixed with faith: `the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe' (Mark 9.24). Here was sorrow for sin chequered with faith, as we have seen a bright rainbow appear in a watery cloud.

Spiritual sorrow will sink the heart if the pulley of faith does not raise it. As our sin is ever before us, so God's promise must be ever before us. As we much feel our sting, so we must look up to Christ our brazen serpent. Some have faces so swollen with worldly grief that they can hardly look out of their eyes. That weeping is not good which blinds the eye of faith. If there are not some dawnings of faith in the soul, it is not the sorrow of humiliation but of despair.

4. Godly sorrow is a great sorrow Ìn that day shall there be a great mourning, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon' (Zech. 12.11). Two suns did set that day when Josiah died, and there was a great funeral mourning. To such a height must sorrow for sin be boiled up. Pectore ab imo suspiria.3

Question 1: Do all have the same degree of sorrow?

Answer: No, sorrow does recipere magis & minus (produce greater or lesser

[sorrows]). In the new birth all have pangs, but some have sharper pangs than others.

(1) Some are naturally of a more rugged disposition, of higher spirits, and are not easily brought to stoop. These must have greater humiliation, as a knotty piece of timber must have greater wedges driven into it.

(2) Some have been more heinous offenders, and their sorrow must be suitable to their sin. Some patients have their sores let out with a needle, others with a lance. Flagitious 4 sinners must be more bruised with the hammer of the law.

(3) Some are designed and cut out for higher service, to be eminently instrumental for God, and these must have a mightier work of humiliation pass upon them. Those whom God intends to be pillars in his church must be more hewn. Paul, the prince of the apostles, who was to be God's ensign-bearer to carry his name before the Gentiles and kings, was to have his heart more deeply lanced by repentance.

Question 2: But how great must sorrow for sin be in all?

Answer: It must be as great as for any worldly loss. Turgescunt lumina fletu. 5

`They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn as for an only son' (Zech. 12.10). Sorrow for sin must surpass worldly sorrow. We must grieve more for offending God than for the loss of dear relations. In that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth' (Isa. 22.12): this was for sin. But in the case of the burial of the dead we find God prohibiting tears and baldness (Jer. 22.10; 16.6), to intimate that sorrow for sin must exceed sorrow at the grave; and with good reason, for in the burial of the dead it is only a friend who departs, but in sin God departs.

Sorrow for sin should be so great as to swallow up all other sorrow, as when the pain of the stone and gout meet, the pain of the stone swallows up the pain of the gout.

We are to find as much bitterness in weeping for sin as ever we found sweetness in committing it. Surely David found more bitterness in repentance than ever he found comfort in Bathsheba.

Our sorrow for sin must be such as makes us willing to let go of those sins which brought in the greatest income of profit or delight. The physic shows itself strong enough when it has purged out our disease. The Christian has arrived at a sufficient measure of sorrow when the love of sin is purged out.

5. Godly sorrow in some cases is joined with restitution Whoever has wronged others in their estate by unjust fraudulent dealing ought in conscience to make them recompense. There is an express law for this: `he shall recompense his trespass with the principal thereof, and add unto it the fifth part thereof, and give it unto him against whom he hath trespassed' (Num. 5.7). Thus Zacchxus made restitution: ìf I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold' (Luke 19.8). When Selymus the great Turk, lay upon his death-bed, being urged by Pyrrhus to put to charitable use that wealth he had wronged the Persian merchants of, he commanded rather that it should be sent back to the right owners. Shall not a Christian's creed be better than a Turk's Koran? It is a bad sign when a man on his death-bed bequeaths his soul to God and his illgotten goods to his friends. I can hardly think God will receive his soul. Augustine said, `Without restitution, no remission'. And it was a speech of old Latimer, If ye restore not goods unjustly gotten, ye shall cough in hell.

Question 1: Suppose a person has wronged another in his estate and the wronged man is dead, what should he do? Answer: Let him restore his illgotten goods to that man's heirs and successors. If none of them be living, let him restore to God, that is, let him put his unjust gain into God's treasury by relieving the poor.

Question 2: What if the party who did the wrong is dead?

Answer: Then they who are his heirs ought to make restitution. Mark what I say: if there be any who have estates left them, and they know that the parties who left their estates had defrauded others and died with that guilt upon them, then the heirs or executors who possess those estates are bound in conscience to make restitution, otherwise they entail the curse of God upon their family.

Question 3: If a man has wronged another and is not able to restore, what should he do?

Answer: Let him deeply humble himself before God, promising to the wronged party full satisfaction if the Lord make him able, and God will accept the will for the deed.

6. Godly sorrow is abiding

It is not a few tears shed in a passion that will serve the turn. Some will fall aweeping at a sermon, but it is like an April shower, soon over, or like a vein opened and presently stopped again. True sorrow must be habitual. O

Christian, the disease of your soul is chronic and frequently returns upon you; therefore you must be continually physicking yourself by repentance. This is that sorrow which is àfter a godly manner'.

Use: How far are they from repentance who never had any of this godly sorrow! Such are:

(1) The Papists, who leave out the very soul of repentance, making all penitential work consist in fasting, penance, pilgrimages, in which there is nothing of spiritual sorrow. They torture their bodies, but their hearts are not rent. What is this but the carcase of repentance?

(2) Carnal Protestants, who are strangers to godly sorrow. They cannot endure a serious thought, nor do they love to trouble their heads about sin. Paracelsus 6. spoke of a frenzy some have which will make them die dancing. Likewise sinners spend their days in mirth; they fling away sorrow and go dancing to damnation. Some have lived many years, yet never put a drop in God's bottle, nor do they know what a broken heart means. They weep and wring their hands as if they were undone when their estates are gone, but have no agony of soul for sin.

There is a two-fold sorrow: firstly, a rational sorrow, which is an act of the soul whereby it has a displacency against sin and chooses any torture rather than to admit sin; secondly, there is a sensitive sorrow, which is expressed by many tears. The first of these is to be found in every child of God, but the second, which is a sorrow running out at the eye, all have not. Yet it is very commendable to see a weeping penitent. Christ counts as great beauties those who are tender-eyed; and well may sin make us weep. We usually weep for the loss of some great good; by sin we have lost the favour of God. If Micah did so weep for the loss of a false god, saying, `Ye have taken away my gods, and what have I more?' (Judges 18.24) then well may we weep for our sins which have taken away the true God from us.

Some may ask the question, whether our repentance and sorrow must always be alike. Although repentance must be always kept alive in the soul, yet there are two special times when we must renew our repentance in an extraordinary manner:

(1) Before the receiving of the Lord's Supper. This spiritual passover is to be eaten with

bitter herbs. Now our eyes should be fresh broached with tears, and the stream of sorrow overflow. A repenting frame is a sacramental frame. A broken heart and a broken Christ do well agree. The more bitterness we taste in sin, the more sweetness we shall taste in Christ. When Jacob wept he found God: Ànd he called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face' (Gen. 32.30). The way to find Christ comfortably in the sacrament is to go weeping thither. Christ will say to a humble penitent, as to Thomas:

`Reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side' (John 20.27), and let those bleeding wounds of mine heal thee.

(2) Another time of extraordinary repentance is at the hour of death. This should be a weeping season. Now is our last work to be done for heaven, and our best wine of tears should be kept against such a time. We should repent now, that we have sinned so much and wept so little, that God's bag has been so full and his bottle so empty (Job 14.17). We should repent now that we repented no sooner, that the garrisons of our hearts held out so long against God ere they were levelled by repentance. We should repent now that we have loved Christ no more, that we have fetched no more virtue from him and brought no more glory to him. It should be our grief on our death-bed that our lives have had so many blanks and blots in them, that our duties have been so fly-blown with sin, that our obedience has been so imperfect, and we have gone so lame in the ways of God. When the soul is going out of the body, it should swim to heaven in a sea of tears.

Ingredient 3: Confession of Sin

Sorrow is such a vehement passion that it will have vent. It vents itself at the eyes by weeping and at the tongue by confession: `The children of Israel stood and confessed their sins (Neh. 9.2). Ì will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence' (Hos. 5.15); it is a metaphor alluding to a mother who, when she is angry, goes away from the child and hides her face till the child acknowledges its fault and begs pardon. Gregory Nazianzen 7

calls confession à salve for a wounded soul.'

Confession is self-accusing: To, I have sinned' (2 Sam. 24.17). Indeed, among men it is otherwise: no man is bound to accuse himself but desires to see his accuser. When we come before God, however, we must accuse ourselves: me me adsum qui feci in me convertite ferrum. 8 And the truth is that by this self-accusing we prevent Satan's accusing. In our confessions we tax ourselves with pride, infidelity, passion, so that when Satan, who is called

`the accuser of the brethren', shall lay these things to our charge, God will say, They have accused them-selves already; therefore, Satan, thou art nonsuited; thy accusations come too late. The humble sinner does more than accuse himself; he, as it were, sits in judgment and passes sentence upon himself. He confesses that he has deserved to be bound over to the wrath of God. And hear what the apostle Paul says: ìf we would judge ourselves we should not be judged' (1 Cor. 11.31).

But have not wicked men, like Judas and Saul, confessed sin? Yes, but theirs was not a true confession. That confession of sin may be right and genuine, these eight qualifications are requisite:

1. Confession must be voluntary

It must come as water out of a spring, freely. The confession of the wicked is extorted, like the confession of a man upon a rack. When a spark of God's wrath flies into their conscience, or they are in fear of death, then they will fall to their confessions. Balaam, when he saw the angel's naked sword, could say, Ì have sinned' (Num. 22.34). But true confession drops from the lips as myrrh from the tree or honey from the comb, freely. Ì have sinned against heaven, and before thee' (Luke 15.18): the prodigal charged himself with sin before his father charged him with it.

2. Confession must be with compunction

The heart must deeply resent it. A natural man's confessions run through him as water through a pipe. They do not at all affect him. But true confession leaves heart-wounding impressions on a man. David's soul was burdened in the confession of his sins: às an heavy burden they are too heavy for me'

(Ps. 38.4). It is one thing to confess sin and another thing to feel sin.

3. Confession must be sincere

Our hearts must go along with our confessions. The hypocrite confesses sin but loves it, like a thief who confesses to stolen goods, yet loves stealing. How many confess pride and covetousness with their lips but roll them as honey under their tongue. Augustine said that before his conversion he confessed sin and begged power against it, but his heart whispered within him, `not yet, Lord'. He was afraid to leave his sin too soon. A good Christian is more honest. His heart keeps pace with his tongue. He is convinced of the sins he confesses, and abhors the sins he is convinced of.

4. In true confession a man particularizes sin

A wicked man acknowledges he is a sinner in general. He confesses sin by wholesale. His confession of sin is much like Nebuchadnezzar's dream: Ì

have dreamed a dream' (Dan. 2.3), but he could not tell what it was: `The thing is gone from me' (Dan. 2.5). In the same way a wicked man says, `Lord, I have sinned', but does not know what the sin is; at least he does not remember, whereas a true convert acknowledges his particular sins. As it is with a wounded man, who comes to the surgeon and shows him all his wounds - here I was cut in the head, there I was shot in the arm - so a mournful sinner confesses the several distempers of his soul. Israel drew up a particular charge against themselves: `we have served Baalim' (Judg. 10.10). The prophet recites the very sin which brought a curse with it: `Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name' (Dan. 9.6). By a diligent inspection into our hearts we may find some particular sin indulged; point to that sin with a tear.

5. A true penitent confesses sin in the fountain

He acknowledges the pollution of his nature. The sin of our nature is not only a privation of good but an infusion of evil. It is like canker to iron or stain to scarlet. David acknowledges his birth-sin: Ì was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me' (Ps. 51.5). We are ready to charge many of our first sins to Satan's temptations, but this sin of our nature is wholly from ourselves; we cannot shift it off to Satan. We have a

root within that bears gall and wormwood (Deut. 29.18). Our nature is an abyss and seminary of all evil, from whence come those scandals that infest the world. It is this depravity of nature which poisons our holy things; it is this which brings on God's judgments and makes our mercies stick in the birth. Oh confess sin in the fountain!

6. Sin is to be confessed with all its circumstances and aggravations Those sins which are committed under the gospel horizon are doubtless dyed in grain. Confess sins against knowledge, against grace, against vows, against experiences, against judgments. `The wrath of God came upon them and slew the fattest of them. For all this they sinned still' (Ps. 78.31-2). These are killing aggravations which do accent and enhance our sins.

7. In confession we must so charge ourselves as to clear God Should the Lord be severe in his providences and unsheathe his bloody sword, yet we must acquit him and acknowledge he has done us no wrong. Nehemiah in his confessing of sin vindicates God's righteousness: `Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us' (Neh. 9.33). Mauritius 9 the emperor, when he saw his wife slain before his eyes by Phocas, cried out,

`Righteous art thou, 0 Lord, in all thy ways'.

8. We must confess our sins with a resolution not to act them over again Some run from the confessing of sin to the committing of sin, like the Persians who have one day in the year when they kill serpents and after that day suffer them to swarm again. Likewise, many seem to kill their sins in their confessions and afterwards let them grow as fast as ever. `Cease to do evil'

(Isa. 1.16). It is vain to confess, `We have done those things we ought not to have done', and continue still in doing so. Pharaoh confessed he had sinned (Exod. 9.27), but when the thunder ceased he fell to his sin again: `he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart' (Exod. 9.34). Origen 10 calls confession the vomit of the soul whereby the conscience is eased of that burden which did lie upon it. Now, when we have vomited up sin by confession we must not return to this vomit. What king will pardon that man who, after he has confessed his treason, practises new treason?

Thus we see how confession must be qualified.

Use 1: Is confession a necessary ingredient in repentance? Here is a bill of indictment against four sorts of persons:

(1) It reproves those that hide their sins, as Rachel hid her father's images under her (Gen. 31.34). Many had rather have their sins covered than cured. They do with their sins as with their pictures: they draw a curtain over them; or as some do with their bastards, smother them. But though men will have no tongue to confess, God has an eye to see; he will unmask their treason: Ì will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes' (Ps. 50.21). Those iniquities which men hide in their hearts shall be written one day on their foreheads as with the point of a diamond. They who will not confess their sin as David did, that they may be pardoned, shall confess their sin as Achan did, that they may be stoned. It is dangerous to keep the devil's counsel: `He that covereth his sins shall not prosper' (Prov. 28.13).

(2) It reproves those who do indeed confess sin but only by halves. They do not confess all; they confess the pence but not the pounds. They confess vain thoughts or badness of

memory but not the sins they are most guilty of, such as rash anger, extortion, uncleanness, like he in Plutarch who complained his stomach was not very good when his lungs were bad and his liver rotten. But if we do not confess all, how should we expect that God will pardon all? It is true that we cannot know the exact catalogue of our sins, but the sins which come within our view and cognizance, and which our hearts accuse us of, must be confessed as ever we hope for mercy.

(3) It reproves those who in their confessions mince and extenuate their sins. A gracious soul labours to make the worst of his sins, but hypocrites make the best of them. They do not deny they are sinners, but they do what they can to lessen their sins: they indeed offend sometimes, but it is their nature, and it is long of such occasions. These are excuses rather than confessions. Ì have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord: because I feared the people' (1 Sam. 15.24). Saul lays his sin upon the people: they would have him spare the sheep and oxen. It was an apology, not a self-indictment. This runs in the blood. Adam acknowledged that he had tasted the forbidden fruit, but instead of aggravating his sin he translated 11 it from himself to God: `The woman thou gayest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat' (Gen. 3.12), that is, if I had not had this woman to be a tempter, I would not have transgressed. Inscripsere deos sceleri 12 (Ovid). That is a bad sin indeed that has no excuse, as it must be a very coarse wool which will take no dye. How apt we are to pare and curtail sin, and look upon it through the small end of the perspective 13, that it appears but as à little cloud, like a man's hand' (1 Kings 18.44).

(4) It reproves those who are so far from confessing sin that they boldly plead for it. Instead of having tears to lament it, they use arguments to defend it. If their sin be passion they will justify it: Ì do well to be angry' (Jon. 4.9). If it be covetousness they will vindicate it. When men commit sin they are the devil's servants; when they plead for it they are the devil's attorneys, and he will give them a fee.

Use 2: Let us show ourselves penitents by sincere confession of sin. The thief on the cross made a confession of his sin: `we indeed are condemned justly'

(Luke 23.41). And Christ said to him, `Today shalt thou be with me in paradise' (Luke 23.43), which might have occasioned that speech of Augustine's, that confession of sin shuts the mouth of hell and opens the gate of paradise. That we may make a free and ingenuous confession of sin, let us consider:

(1) Holy confession gives glory to God: `My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him' (Josh. 7.19). A humble confession exalts God. What a glory is it to him that out of our own mouths he does not condemn us? While we confess sin, God's patience is magnified in sparing, and his free grace in saving such sinners.

(2) Confession is a means to humble the soul. He who subscribes himself a hell-deserving sinner will have little heart to be proud. Like the violet, he will hang down his head in humility. A true penitent confesses that he mingles sin with all he does, and therefore has nothing to boast of. Uzziah, though a king, yet had a leprosy in his forehead; he had enough to abase him (2 Chron. 26.19). So a child of God, even when he does good, yet acknowledges much evil to be in that good. This lays all his feathers of pride in the dust.

(3) Confession gives vent to a troubled heart. When guilt lies boiling in the conscience, confession gives ease. It is like the lancing of an abscess which gives ease to the patient.

(4) Confession purges out sin. Augustine called it `the expeller of vice'. Sin is a bad blood; confession is like the opening of a vein to let it out. Confession is like the dung-gate, through which all the filth of the city was carried forth (Neh. 3.13). Confession is like pumping at the leak; it lets out that sin which would otherwise drown. Confession is the sponge that wipes the spots from off the soul.

(5) Confession of sin endears Christ to the soul. If I say I am a sinner, how precious will Christ's blood be to me! After Paul has confessed a body of sin, he breaks forth into a gratulatory triumph for Christ: Ì thank God through Jesus Christ' (Rom. 7.25). If a debtor confesses a judgment but the creditor will not exact the debt, instead appointing his own son to pay it, will not the debtor be very thankful? So when we confess the debt, and that even though we should for ever lie in hell we cannot pay it, but that God should appoint his own Son to lay down his blood for the payment of our debt, how is free grace magnified and Jesus Christ eternally loved and admired!

(6) Confession of sin makes way for pardon. No sooner did the prodigal come with a confession in his mouth, Ì have sinned against heaven', than his father's heart did melt towards him, and he kissed him (Luke 15.20). When David said, Ì have sinned', the prophet brought him a box with a pardon, `The Lord hath put away thy sin' (2 Sam. 12.13). He who sincerely confesses sin has God's bond for a pardon: Ìf we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins' (1 John 1.9). Why does not the apostle say that if we confess he is merciful to forgive our sins? No; he is just, because he has bound himself by promise to forgive such. God's truth and justice are engaged for the pardoning of that man who confesses sin and comes with a penitent heart by faith in Christ.

(7) How reasonable and easy is this command that we should confess sin!

(a) It is a reasonable command, for if one has wronged another, what is more rational than to confess he has wronged him? We, having wronged God by sin, how equal and consonant to reason is it that we should confess the offence. (b) It is an easy command. What a vast difference is there between the first covenant and the second! In the first covenant it was, if you commit sin you die; in the second covenant it is, if you confess sin you shall have mercy. In the first covenant no surety was allowed; under the covenant of grace, if we do but confess the debt, Christ will be our surety. What way could be thought of as more ready and facile for the salvation of man than a humble confession? Ònly acknowledge thine iniquity' (Jer. 3.13). God says to us, I do not ask for sacrifices of rams to expiate your guilt; I do not bid you part with the fruit of your body for the sin of your soul, ònly acknowledge thine iniquity'; do but draw up an indictment against yourself and plead guilty, and you shall be sure of mercy.

All this should render this duty amiable. Throw out the poison of sin by confession, and `this day is salvation come to thy house'.

There remains one case of conscience: are we bound to confess our sins to men? The papists insist much upon auricular confession; one must confess his sins in the ear of the priest or he cannot be absolved. They urge, `Confess your sins one to another' (James

5.16), but this scripture is little to their purpose. It may as well mean that the priest should confess to the people as well as the people to the priest. Auricular confession is one of the Pope's golden doctrines. Like the fish in the Gospel, it has money in its mouth: `when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money' (Matt. 17.27). But though I am not for confession to men in a popish sense, yet I think in three cases there ought to be confession to men:

(1) Firstly, where a person has fallen into scandalous sin and by it has been an occasion of offence to some and of falling to others, he ought to make a solemn and open acknowledgement of his sin, that his repentance may be as visible as his scandal (2 Cor. 2.6-7).

(2) Secondly, where a man has confessed his sin to God, yet still his conscience is burdened, and he can have no ease in his mind, it is very requisite that he should confess his sins to some prudent, pious friend, who may advise him and speak a word in due season (James 5.16). It is a sinful modesty in Christians that they are not more free with their ministers and other spiritual friends in unburdening themselves and opening the sores and troubles of their souls to them. If there is a thorn sticking in the conscience, it is good to make use of those who may help to pluck it out.

(3) Thirdly, where any man has slandered another and by clipping his good name has made it weigh lighter, he is bound to make confession. The scorpion carries its poison in its tail, the slanderer in his tongue. His words pierce deep like the quills of the porcupine. That person who has murdered another in his good name or, by bearing false witness, has damaged him in his estate, ought to confess his sin and ask forgiveness: ìf thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift'

(Matt. 5.23-4). How can this reconciliation be effected but by confessing the injury? Till this is done,

God will accept none of your services. Do not think the holiness of the altar will privilege you; your praying and hearing are in vain till you have appeased your brother's anger by confessing your fault to him.

3. The Nature of True Repentance (2)

Ingredient 4: Shame for Sin

The fourth ingredient in repentance is shame: `that they may be ashamed of their iniquities' (Ezek. 43.10). Blushing is the colour of virtue. When the heart has been made black with sin, grace makes the face red with blushing: Ì am ashamed and blush to lift up my face' (Ezra 9.6). The repenting prodigal was so ashamed of his excess that he thought himself not worthy to be called a son any more (Luke 15.21). Repentance causes a holy bashfulness. If Christ's blood were not at the sinner's heart, there would not so much blood come in the face. There are nine considerations about sin which may cause shame:

1. Every sin makes us guilty, and guilt usually breeds shame. Adam never blushed in the time of innocency. While he kept the whiteness of the lily, he had not the blushing of the rose; but when he had deflowered his soul by sin, then he was ashamed. Sin has tainted our blood. We are guilty of high treason against the Crown of heaven. This may cause a

holy modesty and blushing.

2. In every sin there is much unthankfulness, and that is a matter of shame. He who is upbraided with ingratitude will blush. We have sinned against God when he has given us no cause: `What iniquity have your fathers found in me?' (Jer. 2.5). Wherein has God wearied us, unless his mercies have wearied us? Oh the silver drops that have fallen on us! We have had the finest of the wheat; we have been fed with angels' food. The golden oil of divine blessing has run down on us from the head of our heavenly Aaron. And to abuse the kindness of so good a God, how may this make us ashamed!

Julius Caesar took it unkindly at the hands of Brutus,1 on whom he had bestowed so many favours, when he came to stab him: `What, thou, my son Brutus?' O ungrateful, to be the worse for mercy! Aelian2 reports of the vulture, that it draws sickness from perfumes. To contract the disease of pride and luxury from the perfume of God's mercy, how unworthy is it; to requite evil for good, to kick against our feeder (Deut. 32.15); to make an arrow of God's mercies and shoot at him, to wound him with his own blessing! 0 horrid ingratitude! Will not this dye our faces a deep scarlet? Unthankfulness is a sin so great that God himself stands amazed at it: `Hear, 0 heavens, and give ear, 0 earth: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me' (Isa. 1.2).

3. Sin has made us naked, and that may breed shame. Sin has stripped us of our white linen of holiness. It has made us naked and deformed in God's eye, which may cause blushing. When Hanun had abused David's servants and cut off their garments so that their nakedness did appear, the text says, `the men were greatly ashamed' (2 Sam. 10.5).

4. Our sins have put Christ to shame, and should not we be ashamed? The Jews arrayed him in purple; they put a reed in his hand, spat in his face, and in his greatest agonies reviled him. Here was `the shame of the cross'; and that which aggravated the shame was to consider the eminency of his person, as he was the Lamb of God. Did [our sins put Christ to shame, and shall they not put us to shame? Did he wear the purple, and shall not our cheeks wear crimson? Who can behold the sun as it were blushing at Christ's passion, and hiding itself in an eclipse, and his face not blush?

5. Many sins which we commit are by the special instigation of the devil, and should not this cause shame? The devil put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ (John 13.2). He filled Ananias' heart to lie (Acts 5.3). He often stirs up our passions (James 3.6). Now, as it is a shame to bring forth a child illegitimately, so too is it to bring forth such sins as may call the devil father. It is said that the virgin Mary conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost (Luke 1.35), but we often conceive by the power of Satan. When the heart conceives pride, lust, and malice, it is very often by the power of the devil. May not this make us ashamed to think that many of our sins are committed in copulation with the old serpent?

6. Sin, like Circe's3 enchanting cup, turns men into beasts (Ps. 49.12), and is not that matter for shame? Sinners are compared to foxes (Luke 13.32), to wolves (Matt. 7.15), to asses (Job 11.12), to swine (2 Pet. 2.22). A sinner is a swine with a man's head. He who was once little less than the angels in dignity is now become like the beasts. Grace in this life does not wholly obliterate this brutish temper. Agur, that good man, cried out, `Surely I am more brutish than any!' (Prov. 30.2). But common sinners are in a manner wholly

brutified; they do not act rationally but are carried away by the violence of their lusts and passions. How may this make us ashamed who are thus degenerated below our own species? Our sins have taken away that noble, masculine spirit which once we had. The crown is fallen from our head. God's image is defaced, reason is eclipsed, conscience stupified. We have more in us of the brute than of the angel.

7. In every sin there is folly (Jer. 4.22). A man will be ashamed of his folly. Is not he a fool who labours more for the bread that perishes than for the bread of life? Is not he a fool who for a lust or a trifle will lose heaven, like Tiberius4

who for a draught of drink forfeited his kingdom? Is not he a fool who, to safeguard his body, will injure his soul? As if one should let his arm or head be cut to save his vest! Naviget antyciram5. (Horace). Is not he a fool who will believe a temptation before a promise? Is not he a fool who minds his recreation more than his salvation? How may this make men ashamed, to think that they inherit not land, but folly (Prov. 14.18).

8. That which may make us blush is that the sins we commit are far worse than the sins of the heathen. We act against more light. To us have been committed the oracles of God. The sin committed by a Christian is worse than the same sin committed by an Indian because the Christian sins against clearer conviction, which is like the dye to the wool or the weight put into the scale that makes it weigh heavier.

9. Our sins are worse than the sins of the devils: the lapsed angels never sinned against Christ's blood. Christ died not for them. The medicine of his merit was never intended to heal them. But we have affronted and disparaged his blood by unbelief.

The devils never sinned against God's patience. As soon as they apostatised, they were damned. God never waited for the angels, but we have spent upon the stock of God's patience. He has pitied our weakness, borne with our forwardness. His Spirit has been repulsed, yet has still importuned us and will take no denial. Our conduct has been so provoking as to have tired not only the patience of a Moses but of all the angels. We have put God to it, and made him weary of repenting (Jer. 15.6).

The devils never sinned against example. They were the first that sinned and were made the first example. We have seen the angels, those morning stars, fall from their glorious orb; we have seen the old world drowned, Sodom burned, yet have ventured upon sin. How desperate is that thief who robs in the very place where his fellow hangs in chains. And surely, if we have outsinned the devils, it may well put us to the blush.

Use 1. Is shame an ingredient of repentance? If so, how far are they from being penitents who have no shame? Many have sinned away shame: `the unjust knoweth no shame' (Zeph. 3.5). It is a great shame not to be ashamed. The Lord sets it as a brand upon the Jews: `Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush' (Jer. 6.15). The devil has stolen shame from men. When one of the persecutors in Queen Mary's time was upbraided with his bloodiness to the martyrs, he replied, Ì see nothing to be ashamed of'. Many are no more ashamed of their sin than King Nebuchadnezzar was of his being turned to grass. When men have hearts of stone and foreheads of brass, it is a sign that the devil has taken full possession of them. There is no creature capable of shame but man. The brute beasts are capable of fear and pain, but not of shame. You cannot make a beast blush. Those who cannot blush for

sin do too much resemble the beasts.

There are some so far from this holy blushing that they are proud of their sins. They are proud of their long hair. These are the devil's Nazarites. `both not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him' (1 Cor. 11.14). It confounds the distinction of the sexes. Others are proud of their Hack spots. And what if God should turn them into blue spots?

Others are so far from being ashamed of sin that they glory in their sins:

`whose glory is in their shame' (Phil. 3.19). Some are ashamed of that which is their glory: they are ashamed to be seen with a good book in their hand. Others glory in that which is their shame: they look on sin as a piece of gallantry. The swearer thinks his speech most graceful when it is interlarded with oaths. The drunkard counts it a glory that he is mighty to drink (Isa. 5.22). But when men shall be cast into a fiery furnace, heated seven times hotter by the breath of the Almighty, then let them boast of sin as they see cause.

Use 2. Let us show our penitence by a modest blushing: Ò my God, I blush to lift up my face' (Ezra 9.6). `My God' - there was faith; Ì blush' - there was repentance. Hypocrites will confidently avouch God to be their God, but they know not how to blush. 0 let us take holy shame to ourselves for sin. Be assured, the more we are ashamed of sin now, the less we shall be ashamed at Christ's coming. If the sins of the godly be mentioned at the day of judgment, it will not be to shame them, but to magnify the riches of God's grace in pardoning them. Indeed, the wicked shall be ashamed at the last day. They shall sneak and hang down their heads, but the saints shall then be as without spot (Eph. 5.27), so without shame; therefore they are bid to lift up their heads (Luke 21.28).

Ingredient 5: Hatred of Sin

The fifth ingredient in repentance is hatred of sin. The Schoolmen'

distinguished a two-fold hatred: hatred of abominations, and hatred of enmity.

Firstly, there is a hatred or loathing of abominations: `Ye shall loathe yourselves for your iniquities' (Ezek. 36.3 I). A true penitent is a sin-loather. If a man loathe that which makes his stomach sick, much more will he loathe that which makes his conscience sick. It is more to loathe sin than to leave it. One may leave sin for fear, as in a storm the plate and jewels are cast overboard, but the nauseating and loathing of sin argues a detestation of it. Christ is never loved till sin be loathed. Heaven is never longed for till sin be loathed. When the soul sees an issue of blood running, he cries out, Lord, when shall I be freed from this body of death? When shall I put off these filthy garments of sin and have the fair mitre of glory set upon my head? Let all my self-love be turned into self-loathing (Zech. 3.4-5). We are never more precious in God's eyes than when we are lepers in our own.

Secondly, there is a hatred of enmity. There is no better way to discover life than by motion. The eye moves, the pulse beats. So to discover repentance there is no better sign than by a holy antipathy against sin. Hatred, said Cicero,z is anger boiled up to an inveteracy. Sound repentance begins in the love of God and ends in the hatred of sin.

How may true hatred of sin be known?

1. When a man's spirit is set against sin:

The tongue does not only inveigh against sin, but the heart abhors it, so that however curiously painted sin appears, we find it odious, as we abhor the picture of one whom we mortally hate, even though it may be well drawn. Ì

love not thee, Sabidi.‘6 Suppose a dish be finely cooked and the sauce good, yet if a man has an antipathy against the meat, he will not taste it. So let the devil cook and dress sin with pleasure and profit, yet a true penitent with a secret abhorrence of it is disgusted by it and will not meddle with it.

2. True hatred of sin is universal:

True hatred of sin is universal in two ways: in respect of the faculties, and of the object.

(1) Hatred is universal in respect of the faculties, that is, there is a dislike of sin not only in the judgment, but in the will and affections. Many a one is convinced that sin is a vile thing, and in his judgment has an aversion to it, but yet he tastes sweetness and has a secret complacency in it. Here is a disliking of sin in the judgment and an embracing of it in the affections; whereas in true repentance the hatred of sin is in all the faculties, not only in the intellectual part, but chiefly in the will: `what I hate, that do I’ (Rom. 7.15). Paul was not free from sin, yet his will was against it.

(2) Hatred is universal in respect of the object. He who hates one sin hates all. Aristotle7 said, hatred is against the whole kind. He who hates a serpent hates all serpents: Ì hate every false way’ (Ps. 119.104). Hypocrites will hate some sins which mar their credit, but a true convert hates all sins, gainful sins, complexion-sins, the very stirrings of corruption. Paul hated the motions of sin (Rom. 7.23).

3. True hatred against sin is against sin in all forms:

A holy heart detests sin for its intrinsic pollution. Sin leaves a stain upon the soul. A regenerate person abhors sin not only for the curse but for the contagion. He hates this serpent not only for its sting but for its poison. He hates sin not only for hell, but as hell.

4. True hatred is implacable:

It will never be reconciled to sin any more. Anger may be reconciled, but hatred cannot. Sin is that Amalek which is never to be taken into favour again. The war between a child of God and sin is like the war between those two princes: `there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days’ (1

Kings 14.30).

5. Where there is a real hatred, we not only oppose sin in ourselves but in others too:

The church at Ephesus could not bear with those who were evil (Rev. 2.2). Paul sharply censured Peter for his dissimulation although he was an apostle. Christ in a holy displeasure whipped the money-changers out of the temple (John 2.15). He would not suffer the temple to be made an exchange. Nehemiah rebuked the nobles for their usury (Neh. 5.7) and their Sabbath profanation (Neb. 13.17). A sin-hater will not endure wickedness in his family:

`He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house’ (Ps. 101.7). What a shame it is when magistrates can show height of spirit in their passions but no heroic spirit in

suppressing vice. Those who have no antipathy against sin are strangers to repentance. Sin is in them as poison in a serpent, which, being natural to it, affords delight.

How far are they from repentance who, instead of hating sin, love sin! To the godly sin is as a thorn in the eye; to the wicked it is as a crown on the head:

`When thou doest evil, then thou rejoicest' (Jer. 11.15). Loving of sin is worse than committing it. A good man may run into a sinful action unawares, but to love sin is desperate. What is it that makes a swine but loving to tumble in the mire? What is it that makes a devil but loving that which opposes God? To love sin shows that the will is in sin, and the more of the will there is in a sin, the greater the sin. Wilfulness makes it a sin not to be purged by sacrifice (Heb. 10.26).

O how many there are that love the forbidden fruit! They love their oaths and adulteries; they love the sin and hate the reproof. Solomon speaks of a generation of men: `madness is in their heart while they live' (Eccles. 9.3). SO

for men to love sin, to hug that which will be their death, to sport with damnation, `madness is in their heart'.

It persuades us to show our repentance by a bitter hatred of sin. There is a deadly antipathy between the scorpion and the crocodile; such should there be between the heart and sin.

Question: What is there in sin that may make a penitent hate it?

Answer: Sin is the cursed thing, the most misshapen monster. The apostle Paul uses a very emphatic word to express it: `that sin might become exceeding sinful' (Rom. 7.13), or as it is in the Greek, `hyperbolically sinful'. That sin is a hyperbolical mischief and deserves hatred will appear if we look upon sin as a fourfold conceit:

(1) Look upon the origin of sin, from whence it comes. It fetches its pedigree from hell: 'He that committeth sin is of the devil, for the devil sinneth from the beginning' (i John 3.8). Sin is the devil's proper work. God has a hand in ordering sin, it is true, but Satan has a hand in acting it out. How hateful is it to be doing that which is the peculiar work of the devil, indeed, that which makes men devils?

(2) Look upon sin in its nature, and it will appear very hateful. See how scripture has pencilled it out: it is a dishonouring of God (Rom. 2.23); a despising of God (I Sam. 2.30); a fretting of God (Ezek. 16.43); a wearying of God (Isa. 7.13); a breaking the heart of God, as a loving husband is with the unchaste conduct of his wife: Ì am broken with their whorish heart' (Ezek. 6.9). Sin, when acted to the height, is a crucifying Christ afresh and putting him to open shame (Heb. 6.6), that is, impudent sinners pierce Christ in his saints, and were he now upon earth they would crucify him again in his person. Behold the odious nature of sin.

(3) Look upon sin in its comparison, and it appears ghastly. Compare sin with affliction and hell, and it is worse than both. It is worse than affliction: sickness, poverty, death. There is more malignity in a drop of sin than in a sea of affliction, for sin is the cause of affliction, and the cause is more than the effect. The sword of God's justice lies quiet in the scabbard till sin draws it out. Affliction is good for us: It is good for me that I have been afflicted' (Ps. 119.71). Affliction causes repentance (2 Chron. 33.12). The viper,

being stricken, casts up its poison; so, God's rod striking us, we spit away the poison of sin. Affliction betters our grace. Gold is purest, and juniper sweetest, in the fire. Affliction prevents damnation (1 Cor. 11.32). Therefore, Maurice the emperor8 prayed to God to punish him in this life that he might not be punished hereafter. Thus, affliction is in many ways for our good, but there is no good in sin. Manasseh's affliction brought him to humiliation, but Judas' sin brought him to desperation.

Affliction only reaches the body, but sin goes further: it poisons the fancy, disorders the affections. Affliction is but corrective; sin is destructive. Affliction can but take away the life; sin takes away the soul (Luke 12.20). A man that is afflicted may have his conscience quiet. When the ark was tossed on the waves, Noah could sing in the ark. When the body is afflicted and tossed, a Christian can `make melody in his heart to the Lord' (Eph. 5.19). But when a man commits sin, conscience is terrified. Witness Spira,9 who upon his abjuring the faith said that he thought the damned spirits did not feel those torments which he inwardly endured.

In affliction one may have the love of God (Rev. 3.19). If a man should throw a bag of money at another, and in throwing it should hurt him a little and raise the skin, he will not take it unkindly, but will look upon it as a fruit of love. So when God bruises us with affliction, it is to enrich us with the golden graces and comforts of his Spirit. All is in love. But when we commit sin, God withdraws his love. When David sinned he felt nothing but displeasure from God: `Clouds and darkness are round about him' (Ps. 97.2). David found it so. He could see no rainbow, no sunbeam, nothing but clouds and darkness about God's face.

That sin is worse than affliction is evident because the greatest judgment God lays upon a man in this life is to let him sin without control. When the Lord's displeasure is most severely kindled against a person, he does not say, I will bring the sword and the plague on this man, but, I will let him sin on: `So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust' (Ps. 81.12). Now, if the giving up of a man to his sins (in the account of God himself) is the most dreadful evil, then sin is far worse than affliction. And if it be so, then how should it be hated by us!

Compare sin with hell, and you shall see that sin is worse. Torment has its emphasis in hell, yet nothing there is as bad as sin. Hell is of God's making, but sin is none of his making. Sin is the devil's creature. The torments of hell are a burden only to the sinner, but sin is a burden to God: Ì am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves' (Amos. 2.13). In the torments of hell there is something that is good, namely, the execution of divine justice. There is justice to be found in hell, but sin is a piece of the highest injustice. It would rob God of his glory, Christ of his purchase, the soul of its happiness. Judge then if sin be not a most hateful thing, which is worse than affliction or hell.

(4) Look upon sin in the issue and consequence, and it will appear hateful. Sin reaches the body. It has exposed it to a variety of miseries. We come into the world with a cry and go out with a groan. It made the Thracians weep on their children's birthday, as Herodotus tells us, to consider the calamities they were to undergo in the world. Sin is the Trojan horse10 out of which comes a whole army of troubles. I need not name them because almost everyone feels them. While we suck the honey we are pricked with the briar. Sin

gives a dash in the wine of our comforts; it digs our grave (Rom. 5.12).

Sin reaches the soul. By sin we have lost the image of God, wherein did consist both our sanctity and our majesty. Adam in his pristine glory was like a herald who has his coat of arms upon him. All reverence him because he carries the king's coat of arms, but pull this coat off, and no man regards him. Sin has done this disgrace to us. It has plucked off our coat of innocency. But that is not all. This bearded arrow of sin would strike yet deeper. It would for ever separate us from the beautiful vision of God, in whose presence is fulness of joy. If sin be so hyperbolically sinful, it should swell our spleen and stir up our implacable indignation against it. As Ammon's hatred of Tamar was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her (2 Sam. 13.15), so we should hate sin infinitely more than ever we loved it.

Ingredient 6: Turning from Sin

The sixth ingredient in repentance is a turning from sin. Reformation is left last to bring up the rear of repentance. What though one could, with Niobe,11

weep himself into a stone, if he did not weep out sin? True repentance, like aqua fortis [nitric acid], eats asunder the iron chain of sin. Therefore weeping and turning are put together (Joel 2.12). After the cloud of sorrow has dropped in tears, the firmament of the soul is clearer: `Repent, and turn your-selves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations' (Ezek. 14.6). This turning from sin is called a forsaking of sin (Isa. 55.7), as a man forsakes the company of a thief or sorcerer. It is called à putting of sin far away' (Job 11.14), as Paul put away the viper and shook it into the fire (Acts 28.5). Dying to sin is the life of repentance. The very day a Christian turns from sin he must enjoin himself a perpetual fast. The eye must fast from impure glances. The ear must fast from hearing slanders. The tongue must fast from oaths. The hands must fast from bribes. The feet must fast from the path of the harlot. And the soul must fast from the love of wickedness. This turning from sin implies a notable change.

There is a change wrought in the heart. The flinty heart has become fleshly. Satan would have Christ prove his deity by turning stones into bread. Christ has wrought a far greater miracle in making stones become flesh. In repentance Christ turns a heart of stone into flesh.

There is a change wrought in the life. Turning from sin is so visible that others may discern it. Therefore it is called a change from darkness to light (Eph. 5.8). Paul, after he had seen the heavenly vision, was so turned that all men wondered at the change (Acts 9.21). Repentance turned the jailer into a nurse and physician (Acts 16.33). He took the apostles and washed their wounds and set meat before them. A ship is going eastward; there comes a wind which turns it westward. Likewise, a man was turning hell-ward before the contrary wind of the Spirit blew, turned his course, and caused him to sail heaven-ward. Chrysostom, speaking of the Ninevites' repentance, said that if a stranger who had seen Nineveh's excess had gone into the city after they repented, he would scarce have believed it was the same city because it was so metamorphosed and reformed. Such a visible change does repentance make in a person, as if another soul did lodge in the same body.

That the turning from sin be rightly qualified, these few things are requisite:

1. It must be a turning from sin with the heart:

The heart is the primum vivens, the first thing that lives, and it must be the primum vertens, the first thing that turns. The heart is that which the devil strives hardest for. Never did he so strive for the body of Moses as he does for the heart of man. In religion the heart is all. If the heart be not turned from sin, it is no better than a lie: `her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly' (Jer. 3.10), or as in the Hebrew, ìn a lie'. Judah did make a show of reformation; she was not so grossly idolatrous as the ten tribes. Yet Judah was worse than Israel: she is called

'treacherous' Judah. She pretended to a reformation, but it was not in truth. Her heart was not for God: she turned not with the whole heart.

It is odious to make a show of turning from sin while the heart is yet in league with it. I have read of one of our Saxon kings who was baptized, who in the same church had one altar for the Christian religion and another for the heathen. God will have the whole heart turned from sin. True repentance must have no reserves or inmates.

2. It must be a turning from all sin:

`Let the wicked forsake his way' (Isa. 55.7). A real penitent turns out of the road of sin. Every sin is abandoned: as Jehu would have all the priests of Baal slain (2 Kings 10.24) - not one must escape - so a true convert seeks the destruction of every lust. He knows how dangerous it is to entertain any one sin. He that hides one rebel in his house is a traitor to the Crown, and he that indulges one sin is a traitorous hypocrite.

3. It must be a turning from sin upon a spiritual ground:

A man may restrain the acts of sin, yet not turn from sin in a right manner. Acts of sin may be restrained out of fear or design, but a true penitent turns from sin out of a religious principle, namely, love to God. Even if sin did not bear such bitter fruit, if death did not grow on this tree, a gracious soul would forsake it out of love to God. This is the most kindly turning from sin. When things are frozen and congealed, the best way to separate them is by fire. When men and their sins are congealed together, the best way to separate them is by the fire of love. Three men, asking one another what made them leave sin: one says, I think of the joys of heaven; another, I think of the torments of hell; but the third, I think of the love of God, and that makes me forsake it. How shall I offend the God of love?

4. It must be such a turning from sin as turns unto God:

This is in the text, `that they should repent and turn to God' (Acts 26.20). Turning from sin is like pulling the arrow out of the wound; turning to God is like pouring in the balm. We read in scripture of a repentance from dead works (Heb. 6.1), and a repentance toward God (Acts 20.21). Unsound hearts pretend to leave old sins, but they do not turn to God or embrace his service. It is not enough to forsake the devil's quarters, but we must get under Christ's banner and wear his colours. The repenting prodigal did not only leave his harlots, but he arose and went to his father. It was God's complaint, `They return, but not to the most High' (Hos. 7.16). In true repentance the heart points directly to God as the needle to the North Pole.

5. True turning from sin is such a turn as has no return:

Èphraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?' (Hos. 14.8). Forsaking sin must be like forsaking one's native soil, never more to return to it. Some have seemed to be converts and to have turned from sin, but they have returned to their sins again. This is a returning to folly (Ps. 85.8). It is a fearful sin, for it is against clear light. It is to be supposed that he who did once leave his sin felt it bitter in the pangs of conscience. Yet he returned to it again; he therefore sins against the illuminations of the Spirit.

Such a return to sin reproaches God: `What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me?' (Jer. 2.5). He that returns to sin by implication charges God with some evil. If a man puts away his wife, it implies he knows some fault by her. To leave God and return to sin is tacitly to asperse the Deity. God, who `hateth putting away' (Mal. 2.16), hates that he himself should be put away.

To return to sin gives the devil more power over a man that ever. When a man turns from sin, the devil seems to be cast out of him, but when he returns to sin, the devil enters into his house again and takes possession, and `the last state of that man is worse than the first' (Matt. 12.45). When a prisoner has broken prison, and the jailer gets him again, he will lay stronger irons upon him. He who leaves off a course of sinning, as it were, breaks the devil's prison, but if Satan takes him returning to sin, he will hold him faster and take fuller possession of him than ever. Oh take heed of this! A true turning from sin is a divorcing it, so as never to come near it any more. Whoever is thus turned from sin is a blessed person: `God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities'

(Acts 3.26).

Use 1. Is turning from sin a necessary ingredient in repentance? If so, then there is little repentance to be found. People are not turned from their sins; they are still the same as they were. They were proud, and so they are still. Like the beasts in Noah's ark, they went into the ark unclean and came out unclean. Men come to ordinances impure and go away impure. Though men have seen so many changes without, yet there is no change wrought within:

`the people turneth not unto him that smiteth' (Isa. 9.13). How can they say they repent who do not turn? Are they washed in Jordan who still have their leprosy upon their forehead? May not God say to the unreformed, as once to Ephraim, Èphraim is joined to idols: let him alone' (Hos. 4.17)? Likewise, here is a man joined to his drunkenness and uncleanness, let him alone; let him go on in sin; but if there be either justice in heaven or vengeance in hell, he shall not go unpunished.

Use 2. It reproves those who are but half-turned. And who are these? Such as turn in their judgment but not in their practice. They cannot but acknowledge that sin, like Saturn,' has a bad aspect and influence and will weep for sin, yet they are so bewitched with it that they have no power to leave it. Their corruptions are stronger than their convictions. These are half-turned, àlmost Christians' (Acts 26.28). They are like Ephraim, who was a cake baked on one side and dough on the other (Hos.7.8).

They are but half-turned who turn only from gross sin but have no intrinsic work of grace. They do not prize Christ or love holiness. It is with civil persons as with Jonah; he got a gourd to defend him from the heat of the sun, and thought that he was safe, but a worm

presently arose and devoured the gourd. So men, when they are turned from gross sin, think their civility will be a gourd to defend them from the wrath of God, but at death there arises the worm of conscience, which smites this gourd, and then their hearts fail, and they begin to despair.

They are but half-turned who turn from many sins but are unturned from some special sin. There is a harlot in the bosom they will not let go. As if a man should be cured of several diseases but has a cancer in his breast, which kills him. It reproves those whose turning is as good as no turning, who expel one devil and welcome another. They turn from swearing to slandering, from profuseness to covetousness, like a sick man that turns from a tertian ague13

to a quartan. Such turning will turn men to hell.

Use 3. Let us show ourselves penitents in turning from sin to God. There are some persons I have little hope to prevail with. Let the trumpet of the word sound never so shrill, let threatenings be thundered out against them, let some flashes of hell-fire be thrown in their faces, yet they will have the other game at sin. These persons seem to be like the swine in the Gospel, carried down by the devil violently into the sea. They will rather damn than turn: `they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return' (Jer. 8.5). But if there be any candour or sobriety in us, if conscience be not cast into a deep sleep, let us listen to the voice of the charmer, and turn to God our supreme good.

How often does God call upon us to turn to him? He swears, Às I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways'

(Ezek. 33.11). God would rather have our repenting tears than our blood.

Turning to God makes for our profit. Our repentance is of no benefit to God, but to ourselves. If a man drinks of a fountain he benefits himself, not the fountain. If he beholds the light of the sun, he himself is refreshed by it, not the sun. If we turn from our sins to God, God is not advantaged by it. It is only we ourselves who reap the benefit. In this case self-love should prevail with us: Ìf thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself' (Prov. 9.12).

If we turn to God, he will turn to us. He will turn his anger from us, and his face to us. It was David's prayer, Ò turn unto me, and have mercy upon me'

(Ps. 86.16). Our turning will make God turn: `Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord, and I will turn unto you' (Zech. 1.3). He who was an enemy will turn to be our friend. If God turns to us, the angels are turned to us. We shall have their tutelage and guardianship (Ps. 91.11). If God turns to us, all things shall turn to our good, both mercies and afflictions; we shall taste honey at the end of the rod. Thus we have seen the several ingredients of repentance.

4. The Reasons Enforcing Repentance, with a Warning to the Impenitent I proceed next to the reasons which enforce repentance.

1. God's sovereign command:

'He commandeth all men every where to repent' (Acts 17:30). Repentance is not arbitrary. It is not left to our choice whether or not we will repent, but it is an indispensable

command. God has enacted a law in the High Court of heaven that no sinner shall be saved except the repenting sinner, and he will not break his own law. Though all the angels should stand before God and beg the life of an unrepenting person, God would not grant it. ‘The Lord God, merciful and gracious, keeping mercy for thousands, and that will by no means clear the guilty’ (Ex 34:6-37). Though God is more full of mercy than the sun is of light, yet he will not forgive a sinner while he goes on in his guilt:

‘He will by no means clear the guilty’!

2. The pure nature of God denies communion with an impenitent creature:

Till the sinner repents, God and he cannot be friends: ‘Wash you, make you clean’ (Isa 1:16); go, steep yourselves in the brinish waters of repentance. Then, says God, I will parley with you: ‘Come now, and let us reason together’

(Isa 1:18); but otherwise, come not near me: ‘What communion hath light with darkness?’ (2 Cor 6:14). How can the righteous God indulge him that goes on still in his trespasses? ‘I will not justify the wicked’ (Ex 23:7). If God should be at peace with a sinner before he repents, God would seem to like and approve all that he has done. He would go against his own holiness. It is inconsistent with the sanctity of God’s nature to pardon a sinner while he is in the act of rebellion.

3. Sinners continuing in impenitence are out of Christ’s commission:

See his commission: ‘The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted’ (Isa 61:1). Christ is a Prince and Saviour, but not to save men in an absolute way, whether or not they repent. If ever Christ brings men to heaven, it shall be through the gates of hell: ‘Him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance’ (Acts 5:31); as a king pardons rebels if they repent and yield themselves to the mercy of their prince, but not if they persist in open defiance.

4. We have by sin wronged God:

There is a great deal of equity in it that we should repent. We have by sin wronged God. We have eclipsed his honour. We have infringed his law, and we should, reasonably, make him some reparation. By repentance we humble and judge ourselves for sin. We set to our seal that God is righteous if he should destroy us, and thus we give glory to God and do what lies in us to repair his honour.

5. If God should save men without repentance, making no discrimination, then by this rule he must save all, not only men, but devils, as Origen once held; and so consequently the decrees of election and reprobation must fall to the ground. How diametrically opposed this is to sacred writ, let all judge.

There are two sorts of persons who will find it harder to repent than others:

(1) Those who have sat a great while under the ministry of God’s ordinances but grow no better. The earth which drinks in the rain, yet ‘beareth thorns and briars, is nigh unto cursing’ (Heb 6:8). There is little hope of the metal which has lain long in the fire but is not melted and refined. When God has sent his ministers one after another, exhorting and persuading men to leave their sins, but they settle upon the lees of formality and can sit and sleep under a sermon, it will be hard for these ever to be brought to repentance. They

may fear lest Christ should say to them as once he said to the fig-tree, ‘Never fruit grow on thee more’ (Matt 21:19).

(2) Those who have sinned frequently against the convictions of the word, the checks of conscience, and the motions of the Spirit. Conscience has stood as the angel with a flaming sword in its hand. It has said, Do not this great evil, but sinners regard not the voice of conscience, but march on resolvedly under the devil’s colours. These will not find it easy to repent: ‘They are of those that rebel against the light’ (Job 24:13). It is one thing to sin for want of light and another thing to sin against light. Here the unpardonable sin takes its rise. Men begin by sinning against the light of conscience, and proceed gradually to despiting the Spirit of grace.

A REPREHENSION TO THE IMPENITENT

Firstly, it serves sharply to reprove all unrepenting sinners whose hearts seem to be hewn out of a rock and are like the stony ground in the parable which lacked moisture. This disease, I fear, is epidemical: ‘No man repented him of his wickedness’ (Jer 8:6). Men’s hearts are marbled into hardness: ‘they made their hearts as an adamant stone’ (Zech 7:12). They are not at all dissolved into a penitential frame. It is a received opinion that witches never weep. I am sure that those who have no grief for sin are spiritually bewitched by Satan. We read that when Christ came to Jerusalem he ‘upbraided the cities because they repented not’ (Matt 11:20). And may he not upbraid many now for their impenitence? Though God’s heart be broken with their sins, yet their hearts are not broken. They say, as Israel did, ‘I have loved strangers, and after them will I go’ (Jer 2:25).

The justice of God, like the angel, stands with a drawn sword in its hand, ready to strike, but sinners have not eyes as good as those of Balaam’s ass to see the sword. God smites on men’s backs, but they do not, as Ephraim did, smite upon their thigh (Jer 31:19). It was a sad complaint the prophet took up:

‘thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved’ (Jer 5:3). That is surely reprobate silver which contracts hardness in the furnace. ‘In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that king Ahaz’ (2

Chron 28:22). A hard heart is a receptacle for Satan. As God has two places he dwells in, heaven and a humble heart, so the devil has two places he dwells in, hell and a hard heart.

It is not falling into water that drowns, but lying in it. It is not falling into sin that damns, but lying in it without repentance: ‘having their conscience seared with a hot iron’ (1 Tim 4:2). Hardness of heart results at last in the conscience being seared. Men have silenced their consciences, and God has seared them. And now he lets them sin and does not punish ‘ ‘Why should ye be stricken any more?’ (Isa 1:5) ‘ as a father gives over correcting a child whom he intends to disinherit.

Notes

Chapter 2

1 i.e. alembic: old distilling apparatus (for refining liquids).

2 Trustful.

3 ‘ Signings from the bottom of one’s heart.’

4 ‘Extremely wicked (sinners).

5 ‘Eyes are swollen with weeping.’

6 ‘A Swiss physician (16th century).

7 ‘A fourth century defender of the faith.

8 `[O Lord] I, even I, who made myself what I am, change my hardness [of heart].’

9 ‘Roman emperor (582-602). Phocas became emperor after Mauritius.

10 ‘One of the early Greek Fathers; he died in 254.

11 Removed.

12 ‘They charge the gods with the crime.”

13 Telescope or microscope.

Chapter 3

1. Brutus, the close friend of Julius Caesar, helped to stab him to death in 44

B.C.

2. A Roman who wrote about nature (early in the third century).

3. An enchantress in Greek legend who gave her magic cup to Ulysses’

companions and changed them into swine.

4. The third Roman emperor, mentioned in Luke 3.1. He reigned from A.D. 14

to 37. For much of his reign he was accused of chronic intoxication.

5. Let him sail to Anticyra.’ Hellebore, a plant found at Anticyra, a town on the Gulf of Corinth, was believed to be a cure for insanity.

6. Theologians of the Middle Ages.

7. A famous orator and statesman of the last century before Christ.

8. An epigram of the Roman writer Martial. Its English counterpart is found in the lines:

I do not love you, Dr Fell,

But why it is I cannot tell;

But this I know, and know full well,

I do not love you, Dr Fell.

9. A Greek of the fourth century B.C., famous as philosopher, logician, metaphysician and `the father of natural science’.

10. Roman emperor in the sixth century.

11. An eminent lawyer living near Venice in the Reformation period (sixteenth century). He turned from Romanism, accepted the Protestant faith, but later apostatized and died in despair in 1548. His Life was published in Geneva in 1550, John Calvin supplying a preface. John Bunyan was deeply impressed by what happened to Spira. The man in the iron cage in the Interpreter’s House in Pilgrim’s Progress undoubtedly represents him.

12. The Greek poet Homer’s story of the wooden horse filled with soldiers by means of which the Greeks captured Troy in the province of Ilium (near the Dardanelles) is one of the most famous stories handed down from the ancient world.

13. The wife of a king of Thebes in ancient times, who boasted of her twelve children, whereupon, according to Greek legend, she lost them all suddenly, and her grief changed her into a stone which shed tears in summer.

14. Non-Christian astrologers have long supposed that the planets exert an influence, good or ill, on human life. The planet Saturn has been supposed to exert a baleful influence on men; hence the adjective `saturnine’.

15. A burning fever occurring every third (by inclusive reckoning, fourth) day.

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