

The Nature of True Repentance

☒ People generally are all at sea on this subject, as though insisting that repentance is an arbitrary arrangement on the part of God. I believe God has made human salvation as easy as the almighty, infinite, mind could make it! But there is a necessity that we “repent and turn to God” (Acts 26:20, KJV).

Since repentance is an indispensable condition of salvation, let us glance at it for a moment and try to find out what repentance really is. How full of confusion the world and the church are on this subject!

Repentance is not merely conviction of sin. If it were, what a different world we would have, for there are tens of thousands on whose hearts God’s Spirit has done His office by convincing them of sin. I cannot tell you the numbers of people who, in our meetings, have grasped my hand and said, “Oh! What would I give to feel as I once felt! There was a time 15, or 17, or 20 years ago when I was so deeply convinced of sin that I could scarcely sleep or eat; ...but, instead of going on till I found peace, I got diverted, cooled down, and now I feel as hard as a stone.” I am afraid there are tens of thousands in this condition—once convinced of sin.

There are thousands of others who are convinced now. They

say, "Yes, it is true what the minister says. I know I ought to lay down the weapons of my warfare against God." They are convinced of sin, but they go no further.

That is not repentance. They live this week as they did last. There is no response to the Spirit; they resist the Holy Ghost.

Neither is repentance mere sorrow for sin. I have seen people weep bitterly and writhe and struggle, yet hug their idols, and in vain you try to shake them from them. If Jesus Christ would only have saved them with the idols, they would have had no objection at all. If they could have got through the straight gate with this one particular idol, they would have gone through long since; but to part with that is another thing.

Such people will weep like your stubborn child when you want him to do something he does not want to do. He will cry, and when you apply the rod, he will cry harder, but he will not yield. When he yields, he becomes a penitent; but until he does, he is merely a convicted sinner.

When God applies the rod of His Spirit, the rod of His providence, the rod of His Word, sinners will cry, and wince, and whine, and make you believe they are praying and want to be saved, but all the while they are holding their necks as stiff as iron.

They will
not submit. The moment they submit they become true penitents
and get
saved.

Neither is repentance a promise that you will forsake sin in the future.

If it were, there would be many penitents in our midst. There is
scarcely a poor drunkard that does not promise, in his own mind, or to
his poor wife, that he will forsake his cups—but he does not do it.

Then what is repentance? Repentance is simply renouncing sin—turning from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God.

This is giving up sin in your heart, in purpose, in intention, in
desire, resolving that you will give up every evil thing, and doing it
now.

Of course, this involves sorrow, for how will any sane man turn himself around from a given course into another if he does not
repent having taken that course? It implies, also, hatred of sin. He
hates the course he formerly took and turns around from it.

He is like the prodigal, when he sat in the swine-yard among the husks and the filth, he fully resolved, and at last he acted.
He went, and that was the test of his penitence.

He might have sat resolving and promising till now, if he had lived that long, and he would never have got the father's kiss, the

father's welcome, if he had not started; but he went. He left the filth, the swine-yard, the husks—he trampled them under his feet; he left the citizens of that country and gave up all his excuses and went to his father honestly, and said, "I have sinned!" That is repentance.

Have you done that? Have you forsaken the accursed thing? Have you cut off that particular thing the Holy Spirit has revealed to you? You know what it is, and you will never get saved until you renounce it.

Submission is the test of penitence. My child may be willing to do a hundred and fifty other things, but if he is not willing to submit on the one point of controversy, he is a rebel, and remains one until he yields.

Now, here is the difference between a spurious and a real repentance. I am afraid we have thousands in our churches who had a spurious repentance: They were convinced of sin, they were sorry for it; they wanted to live a better life, to love God in a sort of general way; but they skipped over the real point of controversy with God; they hid it from their pastor, perhaps, and from the deacons, and from the people who talked with them.

Now, I say, Abraham might have been willing to have given

up every other thing he possessed; but, if he had not been willing to give up Isaac, all else would have been useless. It is your Isaac God wants.

You have got an Isaac, just as the young ruler had his possessions. You have got something you are holding on to that the Holy Spirit says you must let go, and you say, "I can't."

Very well; then you must stop outside the kingdom.

My dear friends, let me persuade you to trample under foot that idol, to tear down that refuge of lies, and to come to God honestly, and say, "Lord, here I am to be a servant, to be nothing, to do anything, to suffer anything. I know I shall be happier with Thy smile and Thy blessing than all these evil things now make me without Thee." When you come to a full surrender, my friends, you will get what you have been seeking, some of you, for years.

But then another difficulty comes in, and people say, "I have not the power to repent." There is a grand mistake. You have the power, or God would not command it.

You can repent. You can this moment lift up your eyes to heaven, and say, with the prodigal, "Father, I have sinned, and I renounce my sin."

You may not be able to weep—God nowhere requires or commands that; but you are able, this very moment, to renounce sin in

purpose, in resolution, in intention. Mind, don't confound the renouncing of the sin with the power of saving yourself from it. If you renounce it, Jesus will come and save you from it.

And do not say, "I do not feel enough." Do you feel enough to be willing to forsake your sin? That is the point. Any soul who does not repent enough to forsake his sin is not a penitent at all!

When you repent enough to forsake your sin, that moment your repentance is sincere, and you may take hold of Jesus with a firm grasp. You have a right to appropriate the promise.

Then it is, look and live. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

Will you come to that point right now? Don't begin making excuses. Now!

Oh! My friend, be persuaded now to repent. Let your sin go away, and come to the feet of Jesus. For your own sake, be persuaded. For the peace, the joy, the power, the glory, the gladness of living a life of consecration to God and service to your fellowmen, yield; but most of all, for the love He bears you, submit.

A great, rough man who was stricken down said to my husband, when he looked up to the place where other people were being saved, "Mr. Booth, I would not go there for a hundred pounds!"

My husband whispered, "Will you go there for love?" and, after a minute's hesitation, the man, brushing great tears away, rose up and followed him.

Will you go there for love—the love of Jesus? The great love wherewith He loved you and gave Himself for you? Will you, for the great yearning with which your Father has been following you all these years? For His love's sake, will you come? Go down at His feet and submit. The Lord help you! Amen.

Catherine Booth was the co-founder, with her husband, William, of the Salvation Army. She was born in Ashbourne, Derbyshire, England and was raised in a Christian home but was not truly converted until age 16. The organization she and her husband founded began as a mission in London's East End, where Catherine played a prominent role. She was committed to social reform and believed women had an equal right to preach. Though initially timid herself, she gained a reputation as a gifted speaker. The mother of eight natural children, Catherine became known as "Mother" in the Army as well.