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CHAPTER 10: REPENTANCE

MATTHEW 3:2 – *"And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

MATTHEW 4:17 – *"From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

ACTS 26:19-20 – *"Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judæa, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."*

IN the mouths of three witnesses—John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and the Apostle Paul—this Word shall be established, namely, that repentance is an indispensable condition of entering the Kingdom of God.

People generally are all at sea on this subject, as though insisting that repentance were 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 in the case, that we should "repent and turn to God." It is just as necessary that my feelings be changed and brought to repentance towards God, as it is that the wicked, disobedient boy should have his feelings brought back into harmony with his father before he can be forgiven. Precisely the same laws of mind are brought into action in both cases, and there is the same necessity in both.

If there is any father here who has a prodigal son, I ask, how is it that you are not reconciled to your son? You love him—love him intensely. Probably you are more conscious of your love for him than for any other of your children. Your heart yearns over him every day; you pray for him night and day; you dream of him by night; your bowels yearn over your son, and you say with David, "Absalom, Absalom, my son, my son." Why are you not reconciled? Why not pat him on the head, or stroke his face, and say, 'My dear lad, I am well pleased with you. I love you complacently; I give you my approbation?' Why are you always reprovng him? Why are you obliged to hold him at arm's length? Why can you not live on amicable terms with him? Why can you not have him come in and out, and live with you on the same terms as the affectionate, obedient daughter? 'Oh!' you say, 'the case is different; I cannot. It is not 'I would not,' but, 'I CANNOT.' 'Before that can possibly be, the boy's



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feelings must be changed towards me. He is at war with me; he has mistaken notions of me; he thinks I am hard, and cruel, and exacting, and severe. I have done all a father could do, but he sees things differently to what they are, and has harboured these hard feelings against me until he hates me, and will go on in defiance of my will.' You say, 'It is a necessity that, as a wise and righteous father, I must insist on a change in him. I cannot receive him as a son till he comes to my feet. He must confess his sin, and ask me to forgive him. Then, oh! how gladly will my fatherly affection gush out! How I should run to meet him, and put my arms around his neck! but there is a 'cannot' in the case.' Just so. It is not that He does not love you, sinner; it is not that the great, benevolent heart of God has not, as it were, wept tears of blood over you; it is not that He would not put His loving arms around you this moment if you would only come to His feet and confess you were wrong, and seek His pardon; but, otherwise he may not—He cannot. The laws of His universe are against His doing so. The good, it may be, of millions of immortal beings is involved. He dare not, and He cannot, until there is a change of mind IN YOU. You must repent. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Well, if repentance be an indispensable condition of salvation, let us glance at it for a moment, and try to find out what repentance really is; and, oh! how full of confusion the world and the church are upon this subject. I say it because I know it by converse with hundreds of people. May the Holy Spirit help us!

Well, first, repentance is not merely conviction of sin. Oh! if it were, what a different world we should have tonight, for there are tens of thousands on whose hearts God's Spirit has done His office by convincing them of sin. I am afraid we should be perfectly alarmed, astounded, confounded, if we had any conception of the multitudes whom God has convinced of sin, as he did Agrippa and Festus. Oh! I could not tell you the numbers of people who, in our anxious meetings, have grasped my hand and said, 'Oh! what would I give to feel as I once felt! There was a time, fifteen, or seventeen, or twenty years ago,' and so on, I when I was so deeply convinced of sin that I could scarcely sleep or eat—that I could find no rest; 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; I know I ought to cut off this right hand and pluck out this right eye." 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



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Holy Ghost.

Neither is repentance mere sorrow for sin. I have seen people weep bitterly and writhe and struggle, but yet hug their idols, and in vain you try to shake them from them. Oh! if Jesus Christ would have saved them with those 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, that is another thing. Such people will weep like your stubborn child when you want him to do something which 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. There is no mistake more common than for people to suppose they are penitents when they are not. There are some of you in this condition, I know. I am afraid you are quite mistaken—you are not penitents. God is true though every man should be a liar; and, if you had sought, as you say you have, and perhaps, think you have; if you had been sincere and honest with God, you would have been saved years ago. Oh! may God, the Holy Spirit help you to come out and be HONEST. That is what God wants—that you be honest. 'Oh!' says He, 'why cover ye my altar with tears, and bring your vain oblations? Just be honest, and I will be honest with you and bless you; but while you come before Me and weep and profess, and bring the halt, and the maimed, and the blind, a curse be upon you.' He looks at you afar off. Be honest. Repentance is not mere sorrow for sin. You may be ever so sorry, and all the way down to death be hugging some forbidden possession, as the young ruler hugged his possessions. THAT is not repentance.

Neither is repentance a promise that you will forsake sin in the future. Oh! if it were, there would be many penitents here tonight. There is scarcely a poor drunkard that does not promise, in his own mind, or to his poor wife, or somebody, that he will forsake his cups. There is scarcely any kind of a sinner that does not continually promise that he will give up his sin and serve God, but he does NOT DO IT.

Then what is REPENTANCE? REPENTANCE IS SIMPLY RENOUNCING SIN—turning round 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 DO IT NOW. Of course,



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this involves sorrow, for how will any sane man turn himself round 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 round from it. He is like the Prodigal, when he sat in the swine-yard amongst 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 as 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 citizen of that country, and gave up all his subterfuges and excuses, and went to his father honestly, and said, "I have sinned!" which implied a great deal more in his language then than it does in ours now. "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee;" and then comes the proof of his submission, "and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants," put me in a stable, or set me to clean the boots, so that I can be in thy family and have thy smile. That is repentance—Jesus Christ's own beautiful illustration of true penitence. Have you done that? Have you forsaken the accursed thing? Have you cut off that particular thing which the Holy Spirit has revealed to you? Is the "but" the hindrance that keeps you out of the kingdom? 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 just 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 that 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, I beseech you, do not deceive yourselves by supposing that you repent, for you do not; but, oh! my dear friends, let me beseech you to repent. The Apostle says, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men;" and this is, I believe, the greatest work of the ministry. To do what? To persuade men to submit. We are constantly talking to thousands of people who know just what God wants of them. We cannot bring many of them any



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new light or a new Gospel. They know all about it. They used to tell me that so often that I longed for a congregation of heathen (which I have found since then), because when such hear the Gospel, like the publicans and sinners of old, they go into the kingdom, while such as some of you who are the natural children of the kingdom are shut out, because when they hear they receive, and submit, and obey, while you stand outside and hold on to your idols, and reason, and quibble, and reject! 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.' Oh! yes you have. 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. Like the man with the withered hand—Jesus intended to heal that man. Where was the power to come from to heal him? From Jesus, of course. The benevolence, the love, that prompted that healing all came from Jesus; but Jesus wanted a condition. What was it? The response of the man's will; and so He said, "Stretch forth thine hand." If he had been like some of you, he would have said, 'What an unreasonable command! You know I cannot do it—I cannot.' Some of you say that; but I say you can and you will have to do it, or you will be lost. What did Jesus want? He wanted that, 'I will Lord,' inside the man—the response of his will. He wanted him to say, 'Yes, Lord;' and, the moment he said that, Jesus supplied strength, and he stretched it forth, and you know what happened.

Don't look forward, and say, 'I shall not have strength;' that is not your matter—that is His. He will hold you up—He is able, when you once commit yourself to Him. Now then, say, 'I will.' Never mind what you suffer—it shall be done. He will pour in the oil and balm. His glorious, blessed presence will do more for you in one hour than all your struggling, praying, and wrestling have done all these weary years. He will lift you up out of the pit. You are in the mire now, and the more you struggle the more you sink; but He will lift you out of it, and put your feet on the rock, and then you will stand firm. Stretch out your withered hand, whatever it may be; say, 'I will, Lord.' You have the power, and mind,



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you have the obligation, which is universal and immediate. God "now commandeth all men everywhere to repent," and to believe the Gospel. What a tyrant He must be if He commands that and yet He knows you have not the power.

Now, do you repent? Mind the old snare. Now, do you weep? Oh! dear, no. The feeling will come after the surrender.

Now, 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 tonight come to that point? Don't begin making an excuse. Now!—all men!—everywhere! NOW! Oh! my friend, if you had done that ten years ago! You have been accumulating sin, condemnation, and wrath ever since. God commanded you these ten years ago to repent, and believe the Gospel, and here you are yet. How many sermons have you heard? invitations rejected? How much blessed persuasion and reasoning of the Holy Spirit have you resisted? how much of the grace of God have you received in vain? Oh! people forget this. I tremble to think what an accumulated load of abused privilege, lost opportunity, and wasted influence such people will have to give an account of. Talk about hell!—the weight of this will be hell enough. You don't seem to think anything of the way you treat God. Oh! people are very much awake to any evil they do to their fellow-men. They can much more easily see the sin of ruining or injuring their neighbours than injuring the great God; but He says, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me." Do you not see the awful weight of condemnation that comes upon you for putting off, rejecting, resisting, vacillating, halting, while He says Now—now? He has had a right to every breath you have drawn, to all your influence, every hour of every day all those ten years. Is it not time you ended that controversy? He may do with you as He did with such people once before—swear in His wrath that you shall not enter into His rest. Are you not provoking Him as they provoked Him? 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 fellow-men, yield; but, most of all, for the love He bears you, submit.



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A great, rough man (stricken down), said to my husband, a few weeks ago, 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 the 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.

From a series of papers by Catherine Booth published in 1881.