

THE
THEOLOGICAL WORKS

OF THE
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AUTHOR OF A COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE.

CONTAINING
THE FORCE OF TRUTH,—TREATISE ON REPENTANCE,—GROWTH IN GRACE,
SERMON ON ELECTION AND FINAL PERSEVERANCE,—SERMONS ON
SELECT SUBJECTS,—ESSAYS ON THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECTS IN
RELIGION, AND THE NATURE AND WARRANT OF FAITH IN CHRIST.

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SERMON V.

ON REPENTANCE.

ACTS, XXVI. 19, 20.

Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

THE propriety and address of the apostle Paul's speech before Agrippa, Festus, and that august assembly, in whose presence he stood as the prisoner of Jesus Christ, have been generally admired: but the faithfulness and courage, with which he pleaded the cause of the gospel, are perhaps still more deserving of our attention. He paid no court to his illustrious auditors; he attempted not to ingratiate himself with them, or even to shun their contempt or aversion: while he used the most effectual means of convincing them, not only that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but that faith in him was absolutely necessary to salvation, and that all men without exception ought to "repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."

Having given a brief narration of his own miraculous conversion; he produced his commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles:—"I have appeared unto thee," says the divine Saviour, "to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee: delivering thee from the people and the Gentiles, to whom now I send thee; to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon," says the apostle, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but showed," first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, "that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." He did not think that in doing thus, "he was disobedient to the heavenly vision:" whence we may assuredly conclude, that in his view of Christianity, these practical subjects entirely consisted with the doctrines of faith and grace, with which his epistles abound. The several Christian graces may, and should be *distinguished*, as they have their appropriate nature and use: but they cannot be *separated* in the person who possesses them. For instance, an impenitent believer, and an unbelieving penitent are ideal characters: true faith is a penitent faith, and true repentance is believing repentance: yet the nature and use of repentance and faith should plainly be distinguished. This will appear more evidently, while from the text we take occasion to consider,

- I. The importance of the subject, as it appears from the Scriptures.
- II. Certain things which are implied in it.
- III. The peculiar nature of repentance and turning unto God.
- IV. And lastly, The works meet for repentance.

1. Let me call your attention, my brethren, to the importance, or prominence of this subject, as it appears from the Scriptures, especially from the New Testament.

John the Baptist was the predicted forerunner of the Messiah, who was sent to prepare the way of the Lord when he came in human nature among his ancient people the Jews: but how did he execute his important office? He came preaching, “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Let me entreat your serious attention to this circumstance:—notwithstanding the advantages of that favoured nation, with all their notions and forms of godliness; there was no order of men, no religious sect, no individual whatever, that did not want repentance, as a preparation for welcoming the Messiah, and sharing the blessings of his spiritual kingdom. Insomuch, that the Baptist said to the Pharisees, as well as to the Sadducees, “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our Father.” Matt. iii. 7–10. Not long after, our Lord himself condescended to preach the gospel; and he too said, “Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” When the apostles went forth at his command, they “preached everywhere that men should repent:” and it appears from part of his discourse to the seventy disciples, that they were charged with the same commission; for he said on that occasion, “Woe unto thee, Chorazin, woe unto thee, Bethsaida; for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in thee, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.” Luke, x. 10–14.

Does our Lord say in one place, “The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost?” He elsewhere explains it, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Does the good Shepherd rejoice and call his friends to rejoice with him, when he has brought home the lost sheep? “So likewise is there joy in heaven,” even “among the angels of God,” “over one sinner that repenteth:” and when the prodigal, returning to his father, was graciously welcomed, all the family was called on to rejoice; “for this, my son, was lost and is found, was dead and is alive.”

On the other hand, Christ “*upbraided* the cities, in which his mighty works had been done, because they repented not.” He told the people, “that the men of Nineveh would rise up in judgment with that generation and

condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonas: and behold a greater than Jonas is here.” He warned the Jews, that “except they repented, they would all likewise perish.” And he summed up the reasons of his gentleness to notorious sinners, and his severity in rebuking the Pharisees, in this remarkable passage:—“A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first and said, Son, go to work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented and went. And he came to the second and said likewise: and he answered and said, I go, Sir; and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, *repented* not afterwards, that *ye might believe him!*” Matt. xxi, 28–32.

“When our Lord was risen from the dead, and about to ascend unto the Father, he said to his apostles on one occasion, “Go ye, preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: and he that believeth not shall be damned.” At another time he instructed them in this manner. “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Mark xvi. 15, 16. Luke xxiv. 46, 47. We may know how the apostles understood their Lord, after they were filled with the Holy Ghost, if we attend to Peter, on the day of Pentecost, thus addressing the convinced Jews, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins:” and afterwards, “Repent and be converted, *that your sins may be blotted out; not because your sins are blotted out; as some modern systems seem to require: and why should men alter the order of Scriptural exhortations, unless they mean to change or confuse the doctrine of Scripture?* Acts ii. 38. iii. 13.

When Peter related the circumstances of Cornelius’s conversion to his brethren at Jerusalem, they made this remark, “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.” Acts xi. 18. When Paul at Athens, before the celebrated council of Areopagus, boldly exposed the ignorance of this renowned seat of pagan philosophy, he said, “The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth *all men every where* to repent.” Acts xvii. 30. And stating the substance of his preaching before the elders of Ephesus, he thus expressed himself, “Testifying, both to the Jews and also to the Gentiles, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Acts xx. 21.

The same apostle, addressing the unbelieving Jews, thus expostulates with them, “Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and

long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance; But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath?" Rom. iii. 4, 5. To the Corinthians he says, "Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of." And he expressed his fears, that when he came among them he should lament many, which had sinned and had not repented." 2 Cor. vii. 10. xii. 21. When he described the case of those who had sinned beyond the reach of mercy, he says, "It is impossible to renew them to repentance;" and on the other hand he directed Timothy, "In meekness to instruct those that opposed themselves, if peradventure God would give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." Where it is particularly to be remarked, that *repentance* is considered as an essential preparation of mind for the reception of the truth, in order that they may "recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who have been taken captive by him at his will." 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26. Heb. vi. 6. And this agrees with Peter's advice to Simon Magus, "Repent of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee." Acts viii. 22.

The testimonies already produced may probably be deemed more than sufficient for the purpose: but let every one remember, that we are not only concerned to prove the truth of the doctrine: it is also requisite to show that the experience and exercise of repentance are indispensably necessary to salvation; and that this hath been a matter of the last importance in religion under every dispensation. I shall however only select one passage from the Old Testament, with which to conclude this part of our subject. "I will judge you, every one according to your ways, saith the Lord God; repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and new spirit, for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; therefore repent, and turn ye." Ezek. xviii. 30–32. Let us then consider,

II. Certain things, which are implied in the language of the text, "That men should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."

It is evidently implied in these words, that all men have sinned. God would never require any one to repent, who had never offended: yet "he commands all men every where to repent." Sin is the transgression of the divine law, either by omission or commission, by defect or redundance, in thought, word, or deed. Few indeed of the human race are acquainted with the full extent and spirituality of this perfect rule: yet all know more than they practise. Every man's conscience therefore must testify, if he allow himself time for reflection, that he hath often wilfully neglected his known duty, and acted contrary to the conviction of his own mind, for the sake of

some idolized worldly object. And this alone proves, that he ought to repent and turn to God, from whom he hath in this manner inexcusably departed.

But “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;” and not merely against a few scandalous and enormous crimes. Many painful effects of the divine displeasure are experienced during the present life, which universally terminate in death: then the sinner’s “body returns to the dust whence it was taken, and the soul returns to God that gave it.” Criminals suffer many things previous to their trial; but the principal punishment is subsequent to condemnation: thus “it is appointed to men once to die, and after death the judgment:” and we are “warned to flee from the wrath *to come*;” from which Jesus delivers his people; who must suffer and die like other men. The connection therefore between sin and future condemnation to everlasting punishment, which cannot be escaped without repentance, is clearly implied in the language of the text.

Nor should we forget, that this condemnation is *merited*; for unless sin deserves the punishment denounced, there can be no free mercy in remitting it. When the apostles were sentenced to stripes or death, for preaching the gospel, they might lament the injustice of the magistrates, but they could not repent of their own conduct in “obeying God rather than men.” Such persons, as deem the laws of any country iniquitous, and their governor's oppressive, will complain when they suffer for disobedience; but they cannot *repent*, unless they be convinced of criminality in themselves. Nor can any man repent of breaking the law, and falling under the condemnation of God, unless he allow that he deserves the threatened punishment. It would carry us too far, to prove or illustrate the justice of God in the sentence pronounced against transgressors, by stating the rebellion, ingratitude, and enmity, which more or less connect with all our violations of the divine law; but surely, if crimes against our fellow-creatures may deserve death, sins against our infinitely glorious Creator merit a punishment proportionably more dreadful. It is not commonly supposed that malefactors are sufficiently impartial, even if in other respects competent, to decide on the equity of the laws, or to amend the criminal code. It becomes us therefore, rather to submit to the justice of God, and to supplicate his mercy, than to reply against him, as if we would condemn that we may be justified.

The text implies likewise, that all have turned away from God. The characters of men are greatly diversified, but all “have forsaken the fountain of living waters, to hew out for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water.” Apostacy from God, or a refusal to render him the worship, love, gratitude, and obedience which he demands; alienation of heart from him, and a disposition to seek happiness anywhere, rather than in his favour and service, are universal. “All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned

everyone to his own way.” All men are become idolaters; they desire and delight supremely in the creature, in one form or other; while a self-sufficient independent spirit, a proneness to self-admiration, and to seek their own will or glory as the ultimate end of all their actions, constitutes another kind of universal idolatry. Hence the necessity of repenting and turning to God, as the supreme object of our love, and the source of our felicity.

But we must also observe, that the text contains an intimation of mercy, and of the way the Lord hath opened, in which the returning sinner may approach him, with full confidence of a gracious reception. If there were any one, who had so grievously offended, that no forgiveness would be vouchsafed him, even if he did most sincerely and penitently seek it; God would never command that man to repent, and turn to him. When a company of malefactors have been convicted on the clearest evidence of the most atrocious crimes; a command from their prince to own their guilt, and apply for mercy in a prescribed way, would be considered as an encouragement to expect a pardon. A hope would spring up in every breast; and if any, who had unreservedly complied with this injunction, should at last be led to execution, they would think themselves trifled with; however just their punishment might otherwise be. Now the Lord hath revealed himself as infinitely merciful to the fallen race of men; he hath opened a new and living way, for our approach to him upon a throne of grace; he hath invited us to draw near, and plead the name of our heavenly Advocate, and the merits of his atoning sacrifice; he hath commanded all men everywhere to repent; and from these things we confidently infer, that every one, without exception, who ‘through grace obeys the call,’ will be saved, by the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus. In short, if any man were sinless, and had no need of repentance, or if any were so sinful that repentance would avail him nothing; the general language of the text would not be suited to the case: but as all have sinned, and “with the Lord there is mercy and plenteous redemption;” as no impenitent sinner can be saved, and no true penitent can be lost; therefore all men are exhorted and commanded to “repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”

III. Then we proceed to consider the peculiar nature of repentance and turning unto God.

The parable of the prodigal son was intended as an illustration of this important subject: and we cannot more advantageously introduce the subsequent discussion, than by adverting to the remarkable expression, which our Lord made use of on that occasion. “*When he came to himself*, he said, how many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!” He had been infatuated, he had acted as one in a delirium, or insane; but now the disorder is removed, he awakes as out of sleep,

recovers the use of his faculties, and perceives his misery and danger. He now sees every object in a new light; he forms a very different judgement of his father's conduct, and the rules and privileges of his family: of his own perverse behaviour, of his associates in vice; and in short of everything connected with his character, situation, and prospects. From this revolution in his judgment, a total alteration takes place in his conduct. He considers the meanest servant of his father as comparatively happy, and himself as a wretched outcast deservedly perishing. His only hope in this extreme distress arises from a persuasion of the tender compassion of his father, whom before he had regarded as an enemy to his happiness: and he determines at all events to return to him, and seek to be reconciled on any terms, as his only refuge from destruction.

In like manner the sinner, having long thought the Lord a hard master, and religion a wearisome service; and in vain sought liberty and pleasure in sin and folly; at length by the rich mercy of God is brought to himself, recovers from his delirium or fascination, to see his misery, and lament his madness. Now he perceives, that the Lord is worthy of all love, obedience, and adoration; that his law is holy, just, and good; that his service is perfect freedom, and his favour, life and felicity; and that sin is but another name for folly, bondage, and ruin. He is convinced, that the poorest believer is far happier than the most prosperous sinner; that his past conduct calls for the deepest humiliation, that his present situation is perilous in the extreme, and that his only refuge is in the compassion of that God, against whom he hath so ungratefully rebelled. Influenced by such considerations, he arises from his grovelling indulgences and low pursuits; he repents and turns to God, with humble confessions and fervent prayers; he struggles through difficulties, resists temptations, and rises above dark, desponding fears; and finds our heavenly Father far more ready to pardon, welcome, and bless him, than he could possibly have expected.

Yes, my brethren, many of you know the meaning of this parable by your own happy experience: and comparing the bitterness of your sinful courses, with the peace and joy which you have found in believing; you are ready to say to others, "Come, taste and see how gracious the Lord is, and how blessed they are that trust in him."—But are there not also among you some persons who never thus "came to themselves"? and have no acquaintance with the change that hath been described?—A few instances may indeed occur, where repentance and conversion have begun so early in life, and been matured so gradually, as to leave no distinct traces of this experience: but they who are strangers to these things, are commonly ignorant of vital Christianity and its saving efficacy. True converts, however imperceptible their progress may have been, are always conscious of desires and dispositions, which are not natural to fallen man; and they are more prone to question, whether a change,

wrought quietly and gradually, can be genuine, than to suppose a more distinct awakening to a new sense of guilt and danger, to be in general unnecessary.

This “coming to ourselves” is often attended with alarm and terror; (which, however, are not at all essential to true repentance:) and it is always productive of godly sorrow, a deep and unfeigned concern for having offended our great and glorious Creator, broken his good laws, acted so foolish and base a part, and done so much injury to our neighbours and relatives. This is likewise connected with self-abasement, lowly thoughts of ourselves, and a disposition to plead guilty before God, and confess our sins unreservedly, with shame and remorse. Thus the Lord speaks of penitent Ephraim by his holy prophet. “I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast chastised me and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after I was turned, I repented; and after I was instructed I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.” Jer. xxxi. 18–20. The effects of repentance are described after a similar manner in Ezekiel: “That thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more for thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee, for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God.” Ezek. xvi. 63. For “he looketh upon men, and if any say I have sinned, and perverted that which is right, and it profited me not, he shall deliver his soul from going down into the pit, and his life shall see the light.” Job xxxiii. 27, 28. “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but he that confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy.” The returning prodigal makes no excuse for his conduct, but says, “Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” And “the publican, who smote on his breast, and cried, God be merciful to me a sinner, went home justified,” rather than the Pharisee that despised him.

While men continue to boast, to palliate their conduct, to throw the blame on others, or to attempt making amends for their sins, they are not truly penitent: but when their excuses are silenced, and they condemn themselves without reserve, they begin to show a temper of mind suited to their situation and character. And never was food more grateful to one perishing with hunger, or liberty more welcome to the poor prisoner, than the gospel of Christ is to every such broken-hearted penitent. He may be exercised with doubts of its truth, or entertain confused notions of its freeness and sufficiency; but as the grand obstacle to believing is removed, this preparation of heart will make way for the fuller illumination and conviction of his understanding; and he will soon most cordially approve and embrace the doctrine of salvation by the cross of Christ.

For the true penitent abhors and detests his sins; he despises and rejects

the wages and pleasures of iniquity; he casts away with loathing all his transgressions, and dreads a relapse into them as the most dire calamity. The gospel therefore entirely coincides with his views, desires, and wants: he renounces all other hopes of salvation, along with his former pursuits and connections, that he may seek liberty and happiness in the favour and service of his reconciled God. His former alienation is removed; he returns to him as his rest and refuge; and through many conflicts and discouragements, he comes to God, to yield himself to his service, to become his spiritual worshipper, and “as bought with a price to glorify him, in body and in spirit which are his.”

In this manner all men ought to “repent and turn to God,” from their worldly idols, and sinful pursuits: and do you not find, my friends, that in keeping at a distance from the fountain of living waters, you prolong your own distress and disappointment? Do none of you, while striving against conviction, or cleaving to your lusts and pleasures, and refusing to humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, experience such disquietude as the Psalmist has described; “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long: for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought in summer.” Psalm xxxii. 3, 4. Why should you then pertinaciously refuse to hearken to the voice of Christ, and the admonitions of your own consciences? Why refuse to draw near to God, that he may draw near unto you? Do you not sometimes feel, though unwilling to own it, that the warnings and counsels of your ministers are reasonable, and that it would be your highest interest to comply with them? Are you not ready to say, “Go thy way at this time, when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee?” But why do you delay to apply for relief, and embrace happiness? Have you not found the world to be vain and vexatious; and the pleasures of sin bitter and painful? Have not all endeavours to establish your own righteousness, or overcome your own passions, habits, and temptations, proved wearisome and unsuccessful? Hear then the words of the sinner’s friend, while he speaks to you in accents of the tenderest love. “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come unto me, hear and your soul shall live.” “Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” Isaiah lv. Confess your sin, therefore, without reserve; forsake them without delay, renounce your former associates in ungodliness: “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father to you, and ye shall be my sons and

my daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. “Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded; be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness; humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.” James iv. 6–10. Make no more vain excuses, pretend not that your sins have been few or small; be not afraid to view them in their full magnitude and malignity; but trust only in the mercy of the Father, the atoning blood and prevailing mediation of the Son, and the powerful grace of the Holy Spirit; return to the Lord with weeping and supplications; and speedily your sorrows shall be turned into joy, and your heaviness into glad songs of grateful praise.

But it is not only our duty to preach, “that men should repent and turn to God;” we must also call on them to do works meet for repentance; and this leads us,

IV. To consider what is meant by this clause of the text.

If a man truly repent of any misconduct, which hath proved injurious to himself or others, he would be glad, were it possible, to undo those actions, which he recollects with shame and remorse. This is indeed impracticable; yet frequently the effects may be prevented or counteracted; which is a work meet for repentance, especially if it be done with much loss and self-denial. This consideration may suggest a powerful inducement to early piety; for even if the sinner should be spared, and live to repent in his riper years, he will seldom be able to prevent the mischievous effects of his youthful iniquities; and that which is practicable and indispensable, will resemble “the cutting off of a right hand, or the plucking out of a right eye.”

The man, who has in any way defrauded others, cannot be thought “to do works meet for repentance,” unless he make restitution to the best of his ability and recollection, whatever mortifying or self-denying circumstances attend it: for without this, *he retains the wages of his crimes, and perpetuates his injustice*. But as one vice often wastes the gains of another, restitution may be absolutely impracticable; and in many cases it is almost impossible to know to whom restitution should be made, even if a man is able and willing to make it. When therefore the apostle says, “Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth;” Eph. iv. 28. he seems to counsel such persons to submit to hard labour and mean fare, that by giving to the poor, they might make such restitution, as their circumstances allowed of: and this is certainly a work meet for repentance. Were this lowly, industrious, and self-denying conduct more common among professors of the gospel, they would more frequently be enabled to adorn the doctrine of Christ, by an unrequired restitution for wrongs, which the laws of men do

not notice, but which a tender well-informed conscience cannot overlook. And when wrong has been done, and the individuals who have been injured cannot be exactly ascertained; the poor, especially of the families with which such men have dealt, should be considered as best entitled to the restitution. This, however, is certain, that the professed penitent himself, whether he have defrauded individuals or the public, cannot retain it, either as a treasure to hoard up, or as a source of indulgence; without putting an accursed thing among his own stuff, and becoming an accursed thing like unto it. Josh. vii.—But we may have traduced the characters, poisoned the principles, or corrupted the morals of others, or in various ways injured them, if we have not robbed them of their property; and though adequate restitution cannot be made; yet we should do all in our power to counteract the effects of our misconduct, and to promote the best interest of those we have harmed, if we would evidence the sincerity of our repentance and faith, and of our love to God and man.

He that well understands the gospel of Christ, and the nature of genuine repentance, will readily perceive, that forgiveness of injuries and love of enemies, are peculiarly required by the words of the text. The man who refuses to forgive, surely forgets his own need of forgiveness! and he, who will do nothing for the benefit of his enemies, can have no proper sense of his own sinfulness, and of the love of God in reconciling us when enemies by the death of his Son. The view, which the true penitent has of Christ, dying on the cross, and praying for his murderers, will render it easy to him, to pity and love his enemies, to do good to them that hate him, and pray for them that despitefully use him and persecute him. These too are works meet for repentance, without which all tears, confessions, and even restitution can never prove it genuine and unfeigned.

Patience under afflictions, contentment in our situation, thankfulness for mercies, and meekness under provocations, might be separately considered, did time permit. But in general, an habitual walk in newness of life, comprises the whole. “The grace of God that bringeth salvation, teaches us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.” Watching and praying against the sins which once had most entire dominion over us: redeeming our time and improving our talents, doing good to all men, especially to the household of faith; a circumspect conduct, and a constant attendance on the ordinances of God; a humble deportment in the family and community, as well as in the church; and a care to “exercise ourselves daily to have a conscience void of offence, towards God and man;” these I say are works meet for repentance.—When the people asked John Baptist, what they should do, in compliance with his exhortation to this effect; he did not require them to retire into deserts, or immure themselves in cloisters, nor even to torment themselves

with excessive austerities: but he recommended liberal charity, strict integrity, and a harmless and exemplary conduct even in the station of publicans and soldiers.

But these hints must suffice, as every reflecting person will be able to branch out the general rules laid down into a variety of particulars; and the grand use of preaching is to lead men to reflection.

Perhaps, however, I am addressing some persons, who still object to the subject; and confiding in the rectitude of their hearts, and the undeviating virtue of their conduct, deem the doctrine of repentance and conversion wholly foreign to their case. I have heard persons of this description gravely observe, ‘that it would be much better to preach the necessity of a good life, than to dwell on repentance, except among the refuse of the species, of whom indeed little hope could be entertained.’ But how can such men help seeing, that they only repeat the objections of the Pharisees against Christ himself, and exactly resemble these ancient opposers of the gospel. I would, however, at present only say: If any one of you had a son, whom you had tenderly treated from his birth, and who should yet act with as much disregard to your counsel and authority, as you have done to those of your Creator, would you not think that he ought to repent of his ungrateful behaviour? And have *you*, then no cause for repentance? Verily whatever you may think, it will hereafter appear, that there “is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine such just persons that need no repentance.”

But does anyone say, ‘I own in general that I ought to repent; yet I find a strange insensibility of conscience, backwardness to humble myself before God, or to renounce the pleasures of sin, and a grievous propensity to delay the necessary business, till my alarms and convictions vanish without any abiding effect.’ To you, my friend, I would observe that repentance is the gift of God; and that Jesus is exalted “to give repentance and remission of sins.” Pray therefore to the Lord to give you repentance and his Holy Spirit: cry in the language of Ephraim, “Turn thou me, and I shall be turned;” and beg of him to take away the heart of stone, and to give the heart of flesh. Meditate also continually on the sufferings of Christ,—the dignity of the sufferer, and the exhibition God hath given us, in that great transaction, both of his holy hatred of sin, and his compassionate love of sinners. This is the most effectual cure for a hard heart, and an unfeeling conscience. “I will pour upon them the Spirit of grace and supplication, and they shall look on me whom they have pierced and mourn.” Zech. xii. 10.

But remember that life is uncertain; God, whom thou provokest, especially by impenitence, is the arbiter of thy life and death. “The Holy Ghost saith, Today if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” Even if your days should be prolonged, you may be given over to final obduracy, and continuance in sin will be sure to increase the anguish of repentance, should

you at last, by a miracle of mercy, be plucked as a brand out of the burning.

Above all, my fellow-sinners, beware lest you be deceived with a false repentance, for nothing so effectually hardens men in impenitence. Some transient convictions, fears, and sorrows, some partial reformation; a new creed, sect, or form of religion; enthusiastic joys and comforts, or delusive fancies of visions and revelations, frequently satisfy men's consciences, and fill them with spiritual pride, while their hearts remain unchanged, the root of sin unmortified, and no works are found meet for repentance! Beware also of the partial despairing repentance of Judas, the temporary repentance of king Saul, the extorted repentance of Pharaoh, and the case of him who was almost persuaded to be a Christian.—Nor let it be imagined, that repentance and conversion to God are confined to the beginning of a religious profession: for as long as we continue sinful, and prone to depart from the Lord, they must constitute our habitual practice, form the dispositions of our hearts, and influence all our tempers, and our conduct.

On the other hand, let not the contrite mourner for sin despond: remember, poor trembling penitent, that “there is joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” Yea, the Lord of angels, “sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied.” Only then beseech the Lord, that your repentance may be genuine, and your conversion entire; thus you will surely find the Lord ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy; and ere long you will joyfully sing, “O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away and thou comfortest me.” “For they that sow in tears shall reap in joy.” “Let then the hearts of those rejoice that seek the Lord.”

Finally, my Christian brethren, while you are careful in other respects to do works meet for repentance; let me exhort you to enter into the spirit of the gospel, by using every means, and encouraging every endeavour, to bring sinners to repentance; and to welcome every penitent with cordial joy and affection, as Ananias did the converted persecutor, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight.” Thus you will manifest the excellency of your principles, and be honoured as instruments in promoting that cause, for which the divine Saviour came into the world and shed his blood upon the cross; and all men will know that you are his true disciples.