PART FIRST.

Concerning the Necessity of Repentance.

B

EFORE we enter more full upon the subject, I would premise, that I choose the word *Necessity,* as the most comprehensive which occurs to my mind: and I would be understood to intend by “the necessity of repentance;” 1. The urgency of the case: sinners must either repent or perish: 2. The reasonableness of repentance: having done wrong, we ought to repent, and act most unreasonably if we do not: 3. The obligation sinners are under to repent, both from this reasonableness of the injunction, and the authority of that God who enjoins it: and, 4. The additional guilt contracted by impenitency. As the same arguments frequently prove the necessity of re­pentance, in more than one of these senses, I thought it would better prevent needless repetition and obscurity in point of method, to treat of the whole at once, than to divide them into different heads. Having thus stated the meaning of the term employed, to prevent ambiguity, and that all may know what we say and whereof we affirm, let us proceed to the proof.

And here, reader, I have no need to inquire into thy character, whether thou art moral or immoral, a sober man or a drunkard, a good or bad relation or member of society, a formal worshipper or profane. Granting all that any man can desire, supposing the character of the reader to be decent, amiable, and respectable among men, I will endeavour to show him, and to show all, their need of repentance.

I. “Because all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”—Few in comparison are acquainted with the extent, strictness, and spirituality of the law of God, as taking cognizance of every thought, word, action, intention, or disposition of the whole heart and life: requiring absolute perfection in all things, continued in even to the last moment of life. Few keep an exact account of their own thoughts, words, and actions, with reference to this law, as the standard of duty and sin: consequently few are sensible, in any tolerable degree, how numerous, or rather how innumerable, their transgressions are. But most, or all, know, that in some instances they have offended God, by doing those actions which he hath forbidden, and leaving undone those which he hath commanded. Surely, reader, thy conscience will excuse me from further evincing this particular. Only listen to this faithful monitor: even now it arraigns, accuses, and condemns thee: and wert thou guilty only of one transgression, (instead of those millions which are noted in God’s book of remembrance,) and shouldest thou die without repenting of that one sin: as sure as conscience now condemns thee, so sure will God condemn thee in that solemn day, “when he shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.” “For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.”

One felony or murder fully proved insures condemnation, equally with ten thousand. “Therefore, by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God;” because all have sinned: “And by the law is the know­ledge of sin.” It takes cognizance of, and condemns, every sin and every sinner; and consequently can justify none, who have once transgressed. But remember, that the number and heinousness of our transgressions, though they add nothing to the *certainty,* yet will add proportionably to the *greatness,* of the merited condemnation: and should add to the depth of our repentance. Could that man be found who had once, and but once, and in the smallest instance, failed of obedience, he would need repentance, it would be his duty, nor could he be saved in impenitence. How needful then repentance for him, whose sins exceed in number the hairs of his head, and equal the mo­ments of his life! For him whose crimes are full of aggravation, and loudly call for vengeance!

II. The law which we have broken is “holy, just, and good.”—There are laws in this land, which condemn the murderer and housebreaker to death. These are reasonable laws, of which none can disapprove, but those who are, or would be guilty of those crimes. We experience them to be the security of our persons, property, and repose. He who breaks these laws, is not only condemned by *them,* but in the judgment of every wise and honest man; and ought in reason to condemn himself like a penitent thief, allowing the jus­tice of the punishment which he suffers. Luke xxiii. 41.

But Nebuchadnezzar made a law, commanding all his officers and servants to worship a golden image, on penalty of being cast into a furnace of fire; Darius made a law, forbidding any of his subjects to worship God for thirty days, on pain of being cast into the den of lions; and many such laws have the tyranny, caprice, and pride of imperious princes and rulers produced. They are however, evidently absurd and impious, and every man will abhor them, in proportion to his wisdom and goodness. The three pious Jews who broke Nebuchadnezzar’s edict, and Daniel who transgressed that of Darius, were indeed condemned by the laws; but they have been admired for their courage, and constancy in *disobedience,* by all good men ever since. Nay, the very consciences of their enemies testified for them, that they had done no­thing amiss. Nor would it have been right for them to have condemned themselves; but rather they might glory in serving God, and keeping a good conscience, in the face of danger and death.

Were the law of God in any degree like those oppressive edicts, we should have cause to be extremely grieved at the hardship put upon us, and alarmed at the sentence denounced against us; but we could not, with any propriety, condemn ourselves, or repent of our transgressions.

We ought not indeed to reply against God: but the absurdity of this pre­sumption arises, not so much from the consideration of his irresistible power and uncontrollable sovereignty, as from that of his absolute perfection of jus­tice and holiness. This we are bound humbly to allow and suppose, even when we cannot perceive it; and to silence all our rising objections by say­ing, “shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Yet God condescended himself to argue the matter with those who thought his ways unequal; he even proposes his conduct in his government of the world to our considera­tion, that we may see and adore his justice; and to our imitation, that we may be holy as he is holy: and the day of judgment will clear up all our dif­ficulties, when the righteousness of God will be fully demonstrated, to the universal satisfaction of his holy creatures, and the confusion and silence of all his enemies. It is indeed blasphemy, to suppose the law of God unrea­sonable, and his government oppressive: but it is a blasphemy congenial to our depraved nature, of which in our hearts we are all guilty, and of which we are with difficulty cured; for “the carnal mind is enmity against God,—is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”

As therefore no sinner can be truly penitent, till he is convinced that the law of God is holy, just, and good; we should first establish this point, in endeavouring to bring sinners to repentance. This is the apostolical me­thod: St. Paul, arguing in the epistle to the Romans against justification by the law, aware of the false conclusions which men of corrupt minds would be ready to draw from his reasonings, again and again purposely leaves his main subject, to assert and prove the goodness of the law notwithstanding. With one accord, also, do all the writers of the sacred volume speak honourably of the *moral* law, expressing their approbation of it, and delight in it: nor is there one exception to this rule. This may show us the great importance of this part of the subject; and how dangerous some inconsiderate expressions are, into which several good men have been betrayed in their zeal for that *fundamental doctrine,—justification by faith alone.*

We may be sure that the law is holy, just, and good; because given by a holy, just, and good God, whose work is perfect: and because, after Adam’s fall, when it became *morally* impracticable for any of his posterity to be justi­fied by it: he is still pleased to continue them under it, judge them ac­cording to it, and condemn them to utter destruction for breaking it.**[[1]](#footnote-1)** “Is there unrighteousness with God?” He would not do these things, if they were not perfectly just. If they appear unjust to us, it is owing to our ig­norance, self-love, low thoughts of God, and favourable thoughts of sin. Nay, so far was God from repealing this law, or abating its strictness, after man’s transgression, that he republished it from Mount Sinai with awful majesty: he requires every one who would escape condemnation at the day of judgment, to condemn himself now for his trangressions of it, and to seek forgiveness from his sovereign mercy; nor would he even thus pardon one sinner, except as his own Son honoured the law, in our stead, by his perfect obedience and death upon the cross. Moreover he gives it into the hand of all believers as a rule of life, a standard of sin and holiness: yea, writes it in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. Thus doth the most high God proclaim to the whole world his determination “to magnify the law, and make it honourable.” And had we no other evidence of its excellency, this, being abundantly sufficient, ought fully to satisfy us; yea, to humble us in the dust for acting so un­reasonably as to break it.

May we not, however, ourselves discern the reasonableness of it, notwith­standing our partiality in our own cause, and our love of sin? God is evidently the perfection of glory and beauty,[[2]](#footnote-2) the Pattern and Fountain of loveliness; from whom all that is lovely in all creatures is an emanation, of whom it is a faint resemblance, which hath comparatively “no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth.” In himself he is therefore worthy of all admiration, love, and worship. From him we derive our existence, and all that rendereth our existence comfortable: our obligations therefore to him, as our Creator and Benefactor, are immense; he deserves then our entire and un­reserved gratitude. Infinite love and gratitude, though he is worthy of them, his law requires not, because we are not capable of them, nor doth it enjoin the love and service of an angel; because he hath not endowed us with angelic capacities. The law runs thus: “Thou shalt love the LORD thy GOD, with all thy heart, and mind, and soul, and strength:” its requirements are proportioned, not to his worthiness but to our capacities. Of this love the man of the slenderest abilities is equally capable with the sublimest genius; the infant as the aged. In proportion to the superiority or in­feriority of capacity, more or less is required: if it be honestly *our all,* the law demands no more.

But the law makes no allowance for our disinclination and indisposition to love and serve God with *our all;* because this is that very malignity of heart which renders us abominable in his sight. Every degree of this temper is a degree of enmity unto God: the very disposition arises from pride, love of the world, and love of sin; and in proportion as it prevails, is contempt of God in comparison with the world, sin, and self. It is therefore in itself in­finitely unreasonable, totally inexcusable, and the very temper of the devil; who is completely detestable, because completely of this abominable disposi­tion.**[[3]](#footnote-3)** When we therefore show that the law is holy, just, and good, be­cause exactly level to our capacities, we mean our *natural powers,* not our *moral dispositions:* the want of the former proportionably excuses, the want of the latter proportionably aggravates, every failure of any given degree of service. Man, not having the powers of an angel, is excusable in not per­forming the services of an angel: but being of an unholy disposition, he is therefore the more inexcusable in any particular act of unholiness; seeing it appears that it was no inadvertency, but the rooted disposition of his heart.

To love and serve God with our all, is the substance of the requirements of the law in the first table. And what can be more reasonable? Can there be any difficulty in loving one who is perfectly lovely, being thankful for such a Friend, or serving such a master, except what arises from the in­excusable badness of our hearts; for this we are condemned, for this we ought to condemn ourselves, “abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes.”

To love all men with equal estimation and benevolence is the substance of the second table: and we need only suppose this law given to our neighbours alone, as the rule of their conduct towards us, in order to perceive its ex­cellency. What lovely, what happy creatures should we be, and what a delightful world would this prove, were all perfectly obedient! None is, or can be miserable, but the transgressor, or they whom transgressors injure. How excellent then this law, which provides for the happiness of the world so completely, that by transgression alone could men become in any degree miserable! Ought we not then to repent of our disobedience, our continual disobedience, and especially of our entire depravity of disposition, which renders us *morally* incapable of obedience.

Let every precept be impartially examined, and these things will appear with still more convincing evidence. For instance; “Remember the Sab­bath-day, to keep it holy.” Is it not highly reasonable that we should de­vote this portion of our time to Him, to whom the whole belongs? Would not our best interests in connection with the glory of God, be promoted by obeying this commandment? “These things he commands us for our good.” How unreasonable then our disobedience! What need have we to repent of forgetting and neglecting to hallow the Sabbath!

Again, “Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.” As we all judge it reasonable that others should behave to us: let conscience determine, whether we have not done wrong in and ought not to repent of, transgressing this rule, in our conduct to others. We might easily examine other precepts, and show them to be equally reasonable. Yea, every one of them is so; and therefore every deviation from perfect obedience is entirely unreasonable. There is nothing in the whole law of God grievous in itself, or difficult, except to our proud and carnal hearts.—David and Paul, men after God’s own heart, greatly loved and delighted in God’s law; Christ, being perfectly holy, entirely delighted in it and perfectly obeyed it: angels and saints in glory enjoy full liberty in obeying it, and find it perfect felicity: yea, God himself, though absolute Sovereign, is pleased to observe in his own conduct, the same rules which he prescribes for ours (as far as consists with his majesty and authority;) his law is the transcript of his own holiness; and when he requires our obedience, he only says, “Be ye holy, for I am holy.” In proportion as we bear his image, we take pleasure in his precepts, and find obedience easy and natural: in proportion as we resemble Satan, we hate the law, and find obedience irk­some, arduous, impossible. How excellent then this law! how vile are we who have broken it! What need have we to repent of our unreasonable conduct.

III. All have need to repent, because all have by sin absolutely destroyed themselves.—A trifling penalty incurred by transgression might reasonably have been disregarded. When human laws only inflict small fines, short imprisonment, or burning in the hand, offenders may treat such penalties with indifference: but when excruciating tortures and ignominious death, are the threatened punishment; when the sentence is impartially and rigorously in­flicted: when the crime is fully proved, and the prisoner closely confined; the most stubborn spirit bends, the stoutest heart is intimidated, and indif­ference is madness.—Art thou then, sinner, careless and unconcerned, in a case infinitely more tremendous? Canst thou find a heart for *gay* amuse­ments, or coolly apply to worldly pursuits, whilst “the wrath of God abideth upon thee,” the law thunders out a dreadful curse against thee, death closely pursues thee, everlasting misery awaits thee? That God whom thou hast of­fended, is at once the Witness, the Judge, and the Avenger of thy crimes: thou canst not hide thy transgressions from his all-seeing eye: thou canst not flee from his omnipresence, resist his almighty power, bribe his inflexible justice, or endure his awful vengeance. The sentence, if thou die impenitent, is already published in the Judge’s own words: “Depart from me, ye cur­sed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” Are not these words of the loving Saviour most dreadful? “Can thy hands be strong, or can thy heart endure,” when they shall sound in thy affrighted ear? Is this “the wrath to come,” surely, inevitably to come, upon an ungodly world? Are these his words, who saith, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away?” Art thou one of the very persons concerned? Art thou a transgressor of the law? Doth the word of God run thus: “Cur­sed is every one, who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them?” And dost thou still remain unconcerned? Indeed, were there no way of escape, it would not be worthwhile to torment thyself before the time. “But there is forgiveness with God,” there is a space allowed for repentance, a way of salvation, a proclamation of mercy: and dost thou still trifle, and not apply thyself immediately to seek deliverance from “the wrath to come?”

Surely these considerations, if laid to heart in a manner suitable to their certainty and importance, would damp the vain mirth of an ungodly world, and turn their songs and laughter into bitter lamentations. Let me, my fel­low sinners, recommend the apostle’s advice to you: “Be afflicted, and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy into heaviness,” James iv. 9. Thus shall your godly sorrow for sin, “work repentance unto salvation not to be repented of.”

IV. The necessity of repentance appears from the justice of this sentence, severe as it may seem.—Sinners are ready to say, “I only gratify my natural inclinations, and enjoy a little irregular pleasure for a few years; and can it consist with the justice and goodness of God to punish me with everlasting misery? Is there any proportion between the crime and the punishment? But consider, poor deluded man, the infinite majesty, purity, and goodness of that God, against whom thy sins are committed: consider that “his is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever:” consider thy relations to him, as his creature, his property, his subject; and the reasonableness of his claim to thy love and obedience, resulting both from his own excellency and authority, and the benefits which he hath conferred on thee: consider the reasonableness of his law, the pleasantness of his service, the happiness of his subjects, and the noble rewards of obedience: then estimate, if thou art able, what injustice, ingratitude, rebellion, contempt, enmity, and obsti­nacy, there is in sin, and what punishment is adequate to its deservings.

If a man injure his equal, it is evil; if he injure his superior it is worse. If a child curse, smite, or murder his parent, his conduct is baser than it would have been had he thus treated a stranger or an equal. The wiser, better and more indulgent the parent, the more atrocious is the crime of the unnatural, ungrateful child. Should a son murder an excellent parent, in the midst of a recent profusion of kindness, without any provocation or mo­tive, except in order to the more unrestrained gratification of some vile passion; what punishment should we deem too severe for the parricide? Add, further, the relation of sovereign to that of parent; a rightful, wise, just, clement sovereign, the common father of his people. For a persecuted David to stretch out his hand against the Lord’s anointed, though a cruel treacherous Saul, would have been highly criminal: how much more to murder a prince of consummate excellency, without the least provocation! for his favourite, on whom his bounty had been lavished, to be the assassin! But for his son, his indulged son, to break through all obligations, human and divine, and murder his father and prince at once, that he might more unrestrainedly in­dulge his lusts, would stamp the action with stupendous baseness! When Absalom designed to act this monstrous part against the man of God’s own heart, even the ill-judged lenity of the too indulgent parent was not per­mitted to rescue the traitor from deserved punishment.—According to the plainest dictates of human reason, the malignity of the action must rise in proportion to the authority and excellency of the party offended, and the offender’s relation and obligations to him. In human affairs, this method of computing the comparative criminality of offences, and proportioning punish­ments, is generally adopted amongst civilized nations. If we are allowed to compute in the same method *the evil of sin,* (and why should we not?) what heart can conceive, or tongue express, or numbers reach, the evil of every offence committed against the majesty of God? By arguments and medi­tations of this kind, we may arrive at some feeble conception of the odiousness of transgressing the divine law: but he alone, who sees all things exactly as they are, is the competent Judge: and my design is not to demonstrate a matter before doubtful, but to illustrate the reasonableness of that which is certainly true. Whether we see and allow it, or not, sin is infinitely evil, and deserving of eternal punishment. Thus He hath determined, “whose judgment we know to be according unto truth.” All his loyal subjects on earth join in praising him, “as righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.” All the inhabitants of heaven thus praise him, even while “the smoke of the torments of the wicked ascendeth up for ever and ever.” None but rebels think the sentence too severe. If we would not have our lot with *them* in another world, let us not rank ourselves among them in this: but let us say, with holy Job, “I have uttered things which I understood not: things too wonderful for me, which I know not.” “I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no farther.” Yea, truly, “every mouth shall be stopped, and all the world shall appear guilty before God;” nay, they “shall be speech­less” when ordered to be cast into outward darkness, “where is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth.”—What cause then have all to repent, who have justly merited so dreadful a punishment!

V. All have cause of, and need for, repentance: because God will most certainly inflict this punishment upon all the impenitent with unabating se­verity. “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” Let no man de­ceive you with vain words: the impenitent sinner shall certainly spend eter­nity “in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.” An awakening truth which Satan and his instruments have in all ages been opposing; but in none more zealously, ingeniously, and, alas! successfully, than in this: for that great deceiver knows that nothing so effectually increases the num­ber of the damned, as the disbelief of eternal damnation. “Ye shall not surely die,” was the first temptation of this murderer of souls: and still his kingdom is supported by the same insinuation. But if there be any meaning in words, if the idea of eternal misery can be conveyed in human language, and if the Bible be the word of God, then the wicked “shall go into EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT.” Though God is rich in mercy, though there is plenteous redemption in the blood of Christ; yet, neither the mercy of God, nor the blood of Christ, avail for any but the penitent: to others, all the threatenings of the law alone belong: nor have they any part or lot in the gospel; except the deeper condemnation of “neglecting such great salva­tion,” and abusing the mercy of God, and the redemption of Christ, into an encouragement to continue in sin. Such sinners “are a people who have no understanding, therefore he that made them will have no mercy on them.” “Oh, consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.” Psalm l. 22.

VI. The necessity of repentance is further evinced by considering the reasonableness of this awful determination. There is a controversy betwixt God and sinners, and blame must rest somewhere. Either God is indeed chargeable with blame, for enacting so strict a law, and annexing so dreadful a penalty on transgressors; or the sinner is as much to blame as this penalty implies, for breaking the law. To harbour one moment the supposition, that any part of the blame belongs to God, is blasphemous; doubtless the whole fault belongs to the sinner. Yet every impenitent sinner, in ex­cusing himself, condemns God. “Wilt thou,” saith he to Job, “disannul judgment? Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?” Job. xl. 8. Why did the sinner break the law, if he did not think it too strict? Doth he *pretend* it was by surprise or sudden temptation, through inadvertency, and not deliberate rebellion?**[[4]](#footnote-4)** Then why doth he not repent? His impenitence for the past, and his present continuance in transgression, strongly imply a most injurious censure of the law, as inconsistent with his happiness: and his vindication of himself and his conduct, implies a censure on the justice of God in condemning sinners, equally injurious.

Now, should God pardon a sinner who thus excuses himself, and tacitly condemns him, he would seem to allow the excuse, and plead guilty to the charge; so that the honour of God and the salvation of an impenitent sin­ner, are irreconcilable contradictions: but God, conscious of his own most perfect justice, and jealous of his own glory, would sooner leave all the world to perish for ever, than thus consent to his own dishonour. Every hope, which any man entertains of pardon in impenitency, involves the absurd sup­position, when carefully investigated, that God will dishonour himself, to humour and favour a proud obstinate rebel. Every such hope is pregnant with the presumption spoken of by Moses. “Lest there be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood; and it cometh to pass, when he hear­eth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk after the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst. The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord, and his jealousy shall smoke against that man; and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.” Deut. xxix. 18-20. Let us, beloved, attend carefully to such plain warnings of the word of God, that we may be armed against the temptations of Satan, and the rising presumption of our own hearts.

VII. The necessity of repentance is further manifested by reflecting, that no impenitent sinner can cordially approve of the salvation, revealed in the word of God. Indeed, did the gospel require men confidently to believe that *their* sins are already pardoned, and that all the blessings of salvation are al­ready theirs, though they are destitute of every gracious disposition, as some have incautiously advanced; no scheme could better suit the pride and car­nality of an impenitent heart. This however, is not the true gospel of Christ, but another gospel, which must be opposed, even though “preached by an angel from heaven.” All are bound to believe that God will forgive the vilest of sinners, who repent and believe in Christ: otherwise they make God a liar: for he hath attested it. When by scriptural evidence, (even by holy dispositions produced, and holy actions performed,) I am sure that my faith is living, and my repentance genuine, I may be humbly sure, that my sins are forgiven, and that I am a child of God, and an heir of glory; but not before. That I shall be welcome, if I come aright, I may be sure before I come: that I have come aright, and am accepted, I can only be assured by the effects I am conscious of, and the fruits of righteousness produced.

The way in which forgiveness and salvation are actually conferred upon sinners, may be thus illustrated. A state-criminal, under sentence of death, is thus addressed by his prince: “You deserve to suffer the rigour of your sentence: no excuse can be made for your rebellion, nor one alleviating circumstance found in your case: yet, by my own clemency, I am disposed to show mercy, so that I may but do it honourably; and so, as effectually to express my disapprobation of your crime for an example to others. I will, therefore, seat myself upon my royal throne, surrounded by my nobles, and multitudes of my subjects, as witnesses of your submission and my clemency. Do you then approach and prostrate yourself in my presence, publicly and humbly confess your guilt, acknowledge you justly merit to be immediately led to execution, then throw yourself upon my royal mercy, and crave your life at my hands. In this humbling method, and in no other, will I forgive your crimes, and become your friend.”—I speak not here of that redemption price which Immanuel paid, that “God might be just and the justifier of him who believeth;” but merely of the glory of God’s justice in our con­demnation, and of his mercy in our salvation; which he requires to be un­reservedly and cordially acknowledged by every one who comes to him for pardon.

But an impenitent sinner always rejects, and generally is affronted with, this preliminary of peace and reconciliation. He stands upon his vindication, and holds fast his pleas and excuses. If he allow that he hath his faults, he insists that he hath his virtues, and expects that they should be accepted by way of compensation. He hopes also to do something more by way of atoning for his faults; and thinks it would be hard, and indeed palpably unjust, to send him, with all his imagined good qualities, sincere obedience, and good intentions, to keep company with thieves, murderers, and prostitutes in the bottomless pit. Such indeed is the self-love and self-partiality of mankind, that you will find few, if any, even of the vilest characters, who have not something of this kind to plead in arrest of judgment: every man’s own faults seem to himself more venial, than those of other men, and his supposed good qualities and actions more estimable; and thus the sinner “flatters himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful.” But, especially, this is the grand objection of the rich, the moral, and the pharisaical. These would bid high and do much, yea, almost any thing but this, which is so in­tolerably mortifying to their self-preference. On this ground principally numbers reject the gospel, part from Christ, and come short of salvation: as “there is no difference; for all have sinned,” all are condemned, none can make satisfaction: all then that are saved must condemn themselves, and submit to be saved by grace alone, through faith in the Son of God. But whilst such persons proudly hesitate and object, the publicans and harlots, being brought to true repentance, approve of this humbling method, and enter into the kingdom of heaven before them.

VIII. Without repentance there can be no preparation of heart for that “holiness, without which no man can see the Lord.” All true Christians are zealous of good works, being taught by “the grace of God which bringeth salvation, to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, right­eously, and godly, in this present world.” The Christian indeed is very far from perfection in good works, and therefore he cannot be justified by them; neither does he at all depend on them: but, by his sincere obedience, his unreserved observation of Christ’s commands, he proves that he is a true believer, and no hypocrite; he glorifies God, adorns the gospel, and promotes the real good of mankind.

But by deep repentance alone is the heart prepared for such a holy con­duct. Without this, there can be no “ceasing to do evil, or learning to do well;” no “hating the evil, and loving the good;” no “abhoring the evil, or cleaving to that which is good.” Without repentance we cannot really love God, desire his glory, reverence his majesty, or delight in his law and service. Mere moral and relative good behaviour in the world, without any due regard to God; or mere external performances in religion, may subsist without repentance: but that holiness which respects the authority of God, as Law-giver and Judge, which springs from love of him and his command­ments, and is intentionally directed to his glory, can only be produced from a heart renewed unto repentance.

Especially that deep sense of personal unworthiness, which is peculiar to the true penitent, prepares the heart to exercise genuine gratitude, content­ment, patience, meekness, forgiveness of injuries, and love of enemies. These dispositions and duties form a very conspicuous part of the Christian cha­racter, as delineated in the sacred Scriptures: but no impenitent man can really exercise these graces, or perform these duties, whatever appearances he may occasionally assume. Yet if this be not our character and conduct, our hope is merely presumption, our profession, hypocrisy: “for if ye for­give not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.” So that without repentance no man can serve God here, or be saved in the world to come.

*Lastly,* Without repentance there can be no meetness for heaven. With­out a correspondent disposition, without an appetite prepared for the object, there can be no gratification. A holy heart relishes and delights in holiness, and is thus prepared for the enjoyment of a holy heaven. But he who de­spises and disrelishes holiness in this world, could find no happiness in that place, where all the joys are holy, and where consequently all the employments would be irksome to him. No impenitent sinner has this “meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light;” because he cannot relish and de­light in holiness: for as soon as he becomes of this disposition, he must in proportion abhor unholiness, and abhor himself for his sinfulness; that is to say, he must repent of his sins.

The whole company of the redeemed are likewise represented as joining in cordial and unreserved praises unto God and the Lamb; giving all the glory of their salvation to the rich mercy of the Father, and the precious blood of the Saviour. These praises imply an acknowledgment of the jus­tice of the sentence executed upon the ungodly: nay, they imply that *they* themselves might justly, and should certainly, have perished with their fel­low-rebels, had not Jesus interposed with his atoning blood. But could any impenitent sinner join this worship with sincere delight? Many openly ar­raign the conduct of the Judge in condemning sinners to eternal misery: and every impenitent heart is disposed to quarrel with this part of the divine conduct. Nor would the case be different, were it possible for a person of this description to enter into heaven: he would secretly condemn his Maker for severity, in eternally punishing others for the very crimes which he him­self had committed, and never repented of; he must dissent from those praises in his heart, which arise from a principle of which he allows not; namely, that distinguishing grace and atoning blood have made all the difference be­tween him and those in hell: he could not in sincerity allow that God would have been glorious, though he had left him to perish. But there is neither hypocrisy, nor discordant voice, nor unholiness, in those happy mansions; therefore no impenitent sinner shall ever enter into them.

Because our self-love renders us so unwilling to believe this important truth; because Satan with such artifice endeavours to draw off our attention from it; because we are so reluctant of ourselves duly to consider it; and because the entangling pursuits and interests, the pleasures, maxims, and examples of the world, have such a tendency to lull us into a fatal security in this respect; I have the more importunately laboured these multiplied demonstrations of the necessity of repentance. Surely, sinner, I have gained my point, fixed thy attention, and fully convinced thee, that thou hast cause to repent, oughtest to repent, and must either repent or perish. Surely thy heart is by this time in some measure suitably affected with the important subject; and thou art even now, with pressing anxiety, inquiring, “What then is repentance?” Beseeching the Lord to assist and bless the attempt, I shall endeavour with all possible seriousness and plainness, to satisfy this inquiry.

1. All who die in unbelief perish for breaking this law: all who are saved, were thus condemned for breaking it; else why did Christ bear their sins for them? Some indeed talk of another and milder law: but where it is found, when promulgated, what it requires, who does keep it, or who is condemned for breaking it, hath never been, nor never can be, determined. Others express themselves very am­biguously about our obligations to keep the law, prior to the consideration of redemption. But “where there is no law there can be no transgression:” where there is no transgression, there can be no con­demnation: and where no condemnation, no occasion for redemption. Thus we repeal the law and sub­vert the gospel. Surely we ought with precision to determine this matter; and to show that man, as God’s creature, is bound to obey his law; that sin is the transgression of the law; that the wages of sin is death; that Christ died (not for Adam’s sin only, or mainly, but) for our transgressions of the law: that they who perish, are condemned (not only or principally because Adam sinned, but) for their own sins; that upon believing in Christ, we are delivered from the condemnation of sinners, but are never released from the obedience we owe as creatures: and that the obligation to obey is enforced on us by most powerful additional motives taken from redemption. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Psalm l. 2. Out of Zion, the *Perfection of Beauty, GOD* hath shined. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This disposition is properly original sin, the effect of Adam’s transgression. Therefore he, as the root, and we in him, as the branches, lost God’s favour and image, and became liable to and fit for de­struction. That this disposition is propagated by natural generation cannot reasonably be denied: that it is properly the punishment of Adam’s sin, seems capable of Scriptural proof. If we cannot clearly perceive the justice of this, we must silence our objections thus: “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” True penitents read their own character, and see their own picture, in Adam’s conduct, and are humbled for original sin, as the fountain of all their actual transgressions. But as it is always either disputed, neglected, or abused, until the heart be otherwise humbled, I did not think it proper particularly to insist upon it in this discourse. Whilst some appear to lay an undue stress on Adam’s transgression, and speak as if it were the only sin for which we were condemned, or Christ died: others totally deny and revile the doctrine of the fall; contending that man now is just such a creature, or nearly, with respect to his moral character and dispositions, as God originally created him. But the apostle Paul more than intimates that the image of God consists in righteousness and true holiness. Now we know that God created man in his own IMAGE: he also made him upright, and pronounced him very good. The question therefore is, what man now is. If experience and observation prove him to be naturally and universally prone to evil, and averse from good; and if the Scripture pronounce him *evil,* and abominable, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart to be only evil continually; he must be fallen from what he was originally. Ingratitude, enmity to God, pride, ambition, envy, malice, lust, falsehood, and covetousness, can form no part of the image of a holy God; or of that up­rightness in which man was first made. But he must be very hardy, who should deny them to form a part of man’s present character. Nor can we suppose the God of truth would first pronounce man very good, and afterwards, without any intervening change, so often declare him altogether abominable. How much more does it become our narrow capacities, and proneness to mistake, to rest satisfied with the Scriptural account; “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin,” “by one disobedience many were made sinners;” and to adore the depths which we cannot fathom than in the pride of philosophy and metaphysics, with such scanty information, to decide upon what we cannot comprehend, and, with daring temerity, to utter such words, as more than seem to be injurious to the divine character! [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This is often the case of the true believer, who delights in the law of God, and hates evil, yet is sur­prised into the commission of that which he abhors, and breaks the law that he loves; but recovering from the surprise, he directly and deeply repents. But this excuse is merely a pretence in others, by which they cover a rooted enmity to the law, an habitual love of sin; and their impenitence discovers their hypocrisy. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)