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Repentance

P. Y. Pendleton

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REPENTANCE

By P. Y. PENDLETON



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REPENTANCE

By P. Y. PENDLETON

(Luke 13:1-5; 18:9-14; 15:11-24.)

REPENTANCE is an essential process in conversion, and conversion is the transformation of man, so that from being a temple to self and self's idols, he becomes a temple of God, a dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit of God.

Whenever any building is constructed it is taken for granted that it is not fit for occupancy till all the litter has been removed. Such cleansing of the new building, temple or house, that it may be used in comfort as a dwelling-place, is analogous to repentance—a cleansing of the human heart and mind that the Holy Spirit may enter and abide.

When faith begins to build within us those ideals, conceptions and resolutions which tend to establish us as holy temples of God, we become painfully, agonizingly conscious of the presence of a vast clutter of unholy debris—the sinful lusts, desires and habits of a misspent life. Repentance is the woman with the broom, the man with the garbage wagon who removes all this refuse to some Valley of Gehenna where

the consuming fire of reformation continuously destroys it with flames that are never quenched.

But repentance is positive as well as negative. If it negatively takes out the rubbish of sin, it also, as a positive and constructive agency, brings in the temple ornaments and all the utilitarian furniture of aggressive righteousness. God also abhors a vacuum. Where there is darkness he commands light, where there is chaos and voidness he creates a universe. So repentance not only demands that we cease to do evil, it also commands that we learn to do well (1 Pet. 3:11; Isa. 1:16, 17). The positive requirements of repentance are urgent. An empty stomach is a menace to health (2 Pet. 2:22; Matt. 5:6) and an empty soul is a refuge for demons (Luke 11:24-26). The stream of repentance finds its spring, or source, in faith. Faith changes the heart, or desire; but repentance reverses our will or purpose. By faith we come to hate iniquity and to have righteousness; but repentance converts sentiment to action, and reduces visionary aspirations to practical, substantial habits. Such is the meaning of the Greek word *metanoia*. It describes such a changed purpose as vitally changes the conduct or habit. Any change of purpose is a repentance, but the repentance which God asks of us as part of our soul's conversion is a change of purpose toward Him. It is more than a mere moral reformation; it includes obedience toward God and love and worship as well. Therefore, in speaking of the repentance which is desired, the Scriptures recognize its godly nature, saying: "I now rejoice, not that ye were made

sorry, but that ye were made sorry unto repentance; for ye were made sorry after a godly sort, that ye might suffer loss by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, a repentance which bringeth no regret: but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (2 Cor. 7: 9, 10).

I. Now, as to repentance, let us note:

1. Ever since the fall God has always asked it of man. He asked it of Cain (Gen. 4: 6, 7). By all his prophets he asked it of Judah and Israel (Jer. 25: 3-7; 32: 32, 33), and by none did he ask with so loud a voice as when he sent John the Baptist, last of the line (Luke 3: 3, 7, 8).

Jesus continued the call to repentance, demanding it of his disciples (Luke 13: 1-5).

Peter asked it in his sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2: 38), and our Lord projected the call in prophetic strains, demanding it of the seven periods of Gentile church life, making a strong appeal for its fruitage in Laodicea, the last of these periods, which is evidently the church of our times, which is pre-eminent in the sin of lukewarmness (Rev. 3: 19).

2. Jesus commanded that repentance be preached (Mark 6: 1, 2; Luke 24: 47), and God requires it universally of all mankind (Acts 17: 30).

3. If man brings it as his soul's real tribute to God, it is always honored of God, even when He has given no promise that He will show mercy. The lives of David, Ahab, and the history Jonah records of the people of Nineveh, give ample instance of such approval of repentance. Even the crucifiers of His Son obtained mercy by it

at Pentecost. Repent, and God will graciously consider you.

II. Repentance works an inward and an outward change.

1. A repentant soul is changed in its attitude toward *man*. Zacchæus illustrates this. When he started to climb down out of the tree he was a hardened publican, but when he reached the ground repentance had altered his life (a) toward the poor, as to whom he had hitherto acted selfishly. Repentance led him to freely donate half his goods to their betterment. (b) Toward the helpless whom he had wronged. To these he not only made restitution, but, because his feelings toward them were utterly transformed, he voluntarily restored fourfold the unjust exaction.

2. A repentant man is changed as to *himself*. The prodigal son came to himself, and repentance corrected and checked his course as a wanderer and headed his steps toward home and the father's love and counsel.

In His parable our Lord pictures the impenitent Pharisee who was too proud of his record, too self-satisfied to change, and in contrast He presents the abased and prostrate publican, who cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner"—a man who so desires change that he abhors his present evil condition.

3. A penitent man is changed toward *God*. The prodigal shows this truth also. "Father, give me," is his first attitude toward the source of his being. "Father, I have sinned, and am not worthy to be called thy son," is his second attitude. Repentance changed his sonship and gave him new con-

ceptions of his father. So repentance opens our eyes to the true character of God, and our sinful conduct toward Him.

4. Repentance changes the life. Things once loved are now hated, and the things formerly avoided are now sought after. What used to be a subject of fear has now become an object of hope, and in the new world created by repentance the God of judgment becomes the God of love, and the Author of consuming fire is now the forgiving Father, the sender of the Christ.

5. A penitent man finds God changed toward him (Ps. 18:25, 26), and the life of the penitent is greatly enlarged and glorified by Jehovah. The rags of self-righteousness and the poverty of the companion of swine are laid aside, and in their place are found the robe and ring, the shoes and sonship of the Father's house. And tears give place to mirth and dancing.

Repentance is a thorny tree, but the fruit of it is fragrant and luscious like apples from the tree of life, and its leaves, likewise, are for the healing of the nations. We sit under its boughs with great delight. Its shadow over us is love,