

GODLY AND UNGODLY REPENTANCE

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Introduction:

Upon His resurrection, Jesus plainly declared that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations”¹. As such, Christ in His work of redemption for His people not only procured a full pardon for sins, but newness of life characterized by repentance. In his conversation with Nicodemus at the onset of His public ministry, Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”². B. B. Warfield saw the phrase “Born of water and the Spirit as a clear reference back to John the Baptist’s, “I indeed baptize with water unto repentance... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”. He wrote, “Whereas John could baptize only with water, Jesus baptized with the Holy Spirit: the repentance which was symbolized by the one was wrought by the other. And this repentance was no mere regret for an ill-spent past, or surface modification of conduct, but a radical transformation of the mind which issues indeed in ‘fruits worthy of repentance’ (Luke iii.8) but itself consists in an inward reversal of mental attitude”³. Clearly, at the time of regeneration, the Holy Spirit works not only saving faith in the elect sinner, but as the framers of the Savoy Declaration of Faith put it, “saving repentance” as well⁴.

This qualifier to repentance of “saving” and in the previous paragraph in the confession of “repentance unto salvation” was certainly meant to distinguish a true repentance from a false repentance, or a Godly repentance from an ungodly repentance. The importance of this distinction cannot be understated. The Apostle Paul exhorted the Corinthians to, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified”⁵. And if we are indeed to properly examine ourselves, then we must be able to identify the presence of true, saving and Godly repentance.

The importance of the real existence of true saving repentance also bears heavily on the proclaiming of the gospel. Often, the proclaiming of the “evangelical grace” of saving repentance is not to be found in what passes for many as evangelizing. These truncated gospel calls simply go no further than to exhort the sinner to “believe”, or “accept Jesus as your personal Savior”. A mere “decision” is called for, and often that one is left

¹ Luke 24.47

² John 3.5

³ B. B. Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002, p. 446; Matthew 3.11

⁴ Chapter XV, *Of Repentance Unto Life and Salvation*, Paragraph III

⁵ 2 Corinthians 13.5

feeling satisfied that a pardon for sins is the full extent of salvation. But ongoing repentance as the fruit of a truly changed heart and transformed mind should also be fully and equally stressed. The Christian is called to, “reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts”⁶. This is no one time event, but an ongoing pursuit of holiness as shown by an active turning away from sin. Joseph was told that Mary would “bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins”⁷. To be saved from sin is to be saved not only from divine condemnation and guilt, but corruption of the heart and depravity.

Repentance and the “Ordo Salutis”

One means of distinguishing the difference between a Godly and an ungodly repentance is to examine the relationship of repentance with respect to the exercise of saving faith. As already stated, the Holy Spirit at the time of regeneration of the sinner implants the dual graces of saving faith and saving repentance. With God’s true elect these graces do not exist apart from one another. There does not exist a penitent unbeliever nor an unrepentant believer. However, as John Colquhoun wrote, “though the principle of saving faith does not in respect of time precede that of true repentance, yet in order of nature, the acting of that faith precedes the exercise of this repentance”⁸. This is clearly illustrated in what the prophet Zechariah wrote; “I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn”⁹. Clearly, from this passage true faith is first exercised in seeing Christ for Who He really is, which then leads to true repentance. In commenting on this verse, Calvin wrote, “God would not only show mercy to his people, but also make them sensible of his mercy”¹⁰. That is to say, that the regenerated sinner in looking upon Jesus by faith for pardoning mercy and grace, is not only justified, but is so moved by God’s outpouring of love, mercy and grace to an undeserving sinner like himself, that he experiences real godly grief and sorrow for his sins which sent Christ to the cross. It is this sorrow and grief which becomes the

⁶ Romans 6.11-12

⁷ Matthew 1.21

⁸ John Colquhoun, *Repentance*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2010, p. 127

Contrary to Colquhoun, John Murray (in his work *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., p. 113) maintained there was no priority in the acting of faith and repentance. He wrote, “The question has been discussed: which is prior, faith or repentance? It is an unnecessary question and the insistence that one is prior to the other is futile. There is no priority. The faith that is unto salvation is a penitent faith and the repentance that is unto life is a believing repentance”. To prove his point, he then quoted the Shorter Catechism’s definition of repentance which reads, “Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with a full purpose of, and endeavor after new obedience”. But the wording that repentance “out of a true sense of sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ” appears to support the view that it is the sinner first grasping by faith the true nature of sin and God’s mercy in Christ that then leads to true repentance.

⁹ Zechariah 12.10

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Prophet Zechariah*, The Ages Digital Library Commentary, Ver. 1.0, 1998, p. 317

foundation and impetus for Godly repentance. Calvin put it more forcefully when he wrote; "Now it ought to be a fact beyond controversy that repentance not only constantly follows faith, but is also born of faith"¹¹.

It is this flow from faith to repentance which occurred as a result of the preaching of the Apostle Peter at Pentecost. When he exhorted, "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ", his hearers then "were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'" to which Peter responded, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"¹². In order for them to have been "cut to the heart", they must have first exercised faith in what they were hearing, that the One they had murdered was in fact the very Son of God come in the flesh as their Messiah, looking on Him as the One whom they pierced. This resulted in a profound felt sense of sorrow and misery for their sins, preparing them to obey Peter's call to repent. Therefore, their repentance flowed from their exercise of faith in Jesus Christ as their crucified Redeemer from whom they would receive remission of sins. That their crucified Redeemer Jesus was indeed the object of their faith is shown in that "those who gladly received his word were baptized"¹³. Calvin wrote concerning these verses, "Wherefore, we have in these few words almost the whole sum of Christianity, namely, how a man renouncing himself and taking his farewell of the world, may addict himself wholly to God; secondly, How he may be delivered by free forgiveness of sins, and so adopted into the number of the children of God. And forasmuch as we can obtain none of all these things without Christ, the name of Christ is therewithal set forth unto us, as the only foundation of faith and repentance"¹⁴. And it is saving faith whereby one renounces oneself and the world. The sinner sorrowfully sees his utter failure to meet God's requirements for righteousness, and he believes in Christ as having met those requirements for him. That drives him to repentance out of love for God, and a deep abhorrence of his sin that brought suffering to the Savior he now desires to please through obedience.

A repentance which goes before saving faith in its acting cannot possibly be a true repentance because "without faith it is impossible to please Him"¹⁵. The true essence of the keeping of the law is love for God and one's neighbor, but one who has not exercised saving faith is still unregenerate and in possession of "the carnal mind (which) is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be"¹⁶. At best, his repentance is a legalized form of repentance driven not by love for God, but by mere fear, conviction and pride. The rich ruler¹⁷ having asked, "What good thing shall I do

¹¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battle, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960, III, III, 1

¹² Acts 2.36-38

¹³ Verse 41

¹⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Acts Of The Apostles*, The Ages Digital Library Commentary, Ver. 1.0, 1998, p. 95

¹⁵ Hebrews 11.6

¹⁶ Romans 8.7

¹⁷ Matthew 19.16-20

that I may have eternal life?" was in no way humbled in his inquiry by Jesus' response of "No one is good but One, that is, God". He simply and boldly asked, "which ones?" after Jesus said, "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments". When Jesus listed several of the commandments, the man had no sense of his sinful misery in having broken every one of them, but went on to declare, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" It was only when Jesus essentially tested him on the first point of the law, "You shall have no other gods before Me"¹⁸, by instructing him to "go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me", that he felt any real sorrow. But we have no record that it was a true sorrow which would have led to true repentance. At that point in time he did not yet appear to have a true saving faith in God's law whereby his motive in keeping it would have been love of God for having provided a Savior who fulfilled the requirements of the law on his behalf.

The Apostle Peter and the false disciple Judas provide a striking illustration of the necessity of faith preceding true repentance. Peter was no less guilty of betrayal in his three instances of denying any association with Jesus. And yet, how different would be their expressions of repentance. When Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, he "was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' ...he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself"¹⁹. There was confession, sorrow and regret, but no hope, just despair. His awful crime loomed so large in his conscience that he reasoned he could never be forgiven. In that state of unbelief and despair, he hung himself in order to, in his mind, be released from his overwhelming sense of guilt. As such, his was only a legal repentance in that he all he knew was conviction and fear. He had no sense of redeeming mercy. After Peter's three denials, we read that, "Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him... and when he thought about it, he wept"²⁰, and wept bitterly as Matthew and Luke recorded it. And Luke added a significant detail by recording that prior to Peter's recalling the Lord's words, "the Lord turned and looked at Peter"²¹. In commenting on this verse, Matthew Henry wrote, "It was a significant look: it signified the conveying of grace to Peter's heart. The crowing of the cock would not have brought him to repentance without this look. Power went along with this look to change the heart of Peter"²². It is easy to imagine Peter very humbly recalling the events surrounding his denials when he wrote, "Be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble... Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour"²³.

It can be a great obstacle and snare to be convinced that true repentance must precede true saving faith in conversion. Colquhoun wrote, "Legal repentance, which is exercised

¹⁸ Exodus 20.3

¹⁹ Matthew 27.3-5

²⁰ Mark 14.72

²¹ Luke 22.61

²² Matthew Henry, *Bethany Parallel Commentary on the Old Testament*, Bethany House Publishers, 1985, p. 481

²³ 1 Peter 5.5,8

by many unregenerate persons, springs from legal conviction and legal terror"²⁴. This legal conviction and fear can at best lead only to attempts at self-reform. This is a works salvation, an endeavoring to relieve a guilty conscience and find acceptance with God through one's own efforts in keeping the law. True repentance is the fruit of love for God, but no true love for God can be shown while one is still an unbeliever and therefore still an enemy in his mind and heart with God. This love for God is expressed in a love for God's moral law because the law in its essence is the very expression of the moral character of God. This truth is brought out by Jesus Himself when He taught His disciples that, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me"²⁵. Colquhoun went on to write, "The exercise of evangelical repentance arises from that true and thorough conviction which is a consequence of that true faith of the law, implanted by the Holy Spirit at regeneration... The subject of true repentance is a convinced sinner"²⁶. A truly "convinced sinner" sees that He has offended God, that God is just in condemning him and that he is unable to keep the law by himself. He then is graciously led by the Holy Spirit to Christ as the One who fulfilled the requirements of the law on His behalf. As such, true conviction, or "true faith in the law" leads to his saving faith in Jesus Christ. And so the groundwork is laid for true repentance.

A sinner under conviction who is convinced that he must first exercise true repentance before he may confidently exercise saving faith in Jesus Christ will only find himself in the "Slough of Despond". "The offers of a compassionate Saviour, and the promises of a great salvation, do but torment them the more; while they falsely persuade themselves that none but the true penitent has a right to apply and trust them. As they cannot be satisfied before the first acting of faith that their exercise of repentance is genuine, and as they cannot attain deliverance from their perplexing fears, nor victory over the least of their spiritual enemies, but by the exercise of faith in the almighty Redeemer, their souls are ensnared, and obstructed in faith, in holiness, and in comfort. So long as they adhere to this false persuasion, it will effectually deter them from coming as sinners to Christ, and from trusting in Him..."²⁷.

Some Distinguishing Marks of Godly Repentance:

John Murray provided a very helpful definition of repentance when he wrote, "Repentance consists essentially in change of heart and mind and will. The change of heart and mind and will principally respect four things: it is change of mind respecting God, respecting ourselves, respecting sin, and respecting righteousness"²⁸. This change of mind respecting sin is such that the truly penitent sinner sees sin as that which has alienated him from God whom he now desires and loves. He detests his offenses against God who has been good, forbearing and longsuffering in His dealings with him²⁹. He

²⁴ Colquhoun, p. 133

²⁵ John 14.21

²⁶ Colquhoun, p. 133

²⁷ Ibid, p. 138

²⁸ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., p. 114

²⁹ Romans 2.4

wants to be done with sinning like one who longs to be rid of a dreadful disease. David knew this detesting of his sin when he wrote, "My sin is always before me. Against You, You only have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight – that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge"³⁰. He would also write regarding his sin: "Innumerable evils have surrounded me; my iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart fails me. Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me; O Lord, make haste to help me!"³¹. And these pleas for deliverance have their foundation in God's pardoning mercy out from which flows a sincere repentance characterized by sorrow for and abhorrence of sin.

As such, one mark of a true Godly repentance is that it emerges from a *real loathing of sin*. One reason is that the true penitent sees sin as a barrier to his communion with God in his prayer life. When his sin is left un-confessed and un-repented of, he avoids coming into the presence of God in prayer because he's ashamed. Like Peter he says, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"³². He keenly feels what God spoke to Israel: "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear"³³. He hates sin because he knows and feels it to be absolutely contradictory to that gracious new principle of life in Christ within him. Its remnants are the enemy within which act as an impediment to his carrying out the deepest desires in his heart for God. Like the Apostle Paul he says, "I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"³⁴.

The repentance of an unregenerate sinner is far different. His turning from his sin is only out of a heightened sense of fear and dread of impending judgment. His mindset regarding sin has only to do with the consequences of sin. The sinner in this case will often attempt to reform himself, but his efforts will not be out of love for God. Instead, self-love provides the only real motivation for his efforts to flee the wrath to come. King Saul provided a tragic example of this legal ungodly repentance on the occasion of his disobedience in the matter of the Amalekites. Samuel exposed Saul's failure to obey God in utterly destroying them along with their livestock. To this Saul confessed, but attempted to excuse himself by saying that "I feared the people and obeyed their voice". Further he pleaded with Samuel, "I have sinned; yet honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord your God"³⁵. Saul's conscience was stricken, and he was sorry for what he had done, but his repentance came only out of fear and a desire to perhaps reverse Samuel's pronouncement of the loss of the kingdom along with an anxious desire to keep up appearances before his subjects. There was no true sense of having offended God, no

³⁰ Psalm 51.3b-4

³¹ Psalm 40.12-13

³² Luke 5.8

³³ Isaiah 59.2

³⁴ Romans 7.21-24

³⁵ 1 Samuel 15.24,30

hatred and taking ownership of his sin, just fear and dread of the consequences of his disobedience. Saul even tried to draw Samuel into his disobedience by asking him to return and worship with him, to sacrifice the animals which should have been destroyed. In this way, Saul might have maneuvered Samuel into appearing as if he sanctioned this use of the spared animals. Samuel declined.

Concerning this legal repentance, Colquhoun wrote, "Let conscience but be pacified, and the tempest of the troubled mind allayed, and these false penitents will return with the dog to his vomit, until some new alarm revive their convictions of sin and danger, and with them, the same process of repentance. Thus many sin and repent, and repent and sin, all their lives. Or it may be, distress of conscience makes a deeper impression, and fixes such an abiding dread of some particular sins that a visible reformation appears. Yet in this case the sinner's lusts are only dammed up by his fears, and were the dam but broken down, they would immediately run again in, their former channel with increasing force"³⁶. And yet, many true penitents are able to look back and see how God used this legal ungodly form of repentance as a prerequisite to real Godly repentance in that they were graciously helped to see their utter inability to reform themselves and to be reconciled to God through the keeping of the law.

This incident with Saul and the Amalekites also serves to highlight another mark of true repentance which is not only the hatred of sin, but *the hatred of all sin*. In the case of Saul, his obedience fell short in that instead of totally destroying the Amalekites and their livestock, some sheep and oxen were spared along with king Agag. In the case of the former, he blamed the people instead of himself and in the case of the latter, he appeared to justify his action by mentioning the bringing back of Agag as a kind of proof that he had fully carried out God's command. Clearly, Samuel's "hack(ing) Agag in pieces before the Lord"³⁷ was a dramatic demonstration of the danger of rationalizing partial obedience, and the need to hate and repent of every sin. The Psalmist exhorted, "You who love the Lord, hate evil!", and in Amos we read, "Hate evil, love good". The Apostle Paul clearly demonstrated that nothing changed in transitioning from the Old to the New Testament when he wrote, "Abhor what is evil"³⁸.

Colquhoun wrote, "In false penitence the sinner is affected chiefly with his gross and open sins; whereas in true repentance the believer is more deeply affected with the secret and darling sins which he formerly delighted to commit... the sin of his nature in general, and the unbelief and legal temper of his heart in particular"³⁹. Naaman the leper illustrated this ungodly state of mind. After being healed of his leprosy, he proclaimed his intent to no longer sacrifice to false gods, but then proceeded to request, "When my master goes into the temple of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand, and I bow down in the temple of Rimmon—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord please pardon your servant in this thing"⁴⁰. Matthew Henry wrote concerning this incident, "It was a happy cure of his leprosy which cured him of

³⁶ Colquhoun, p. 88

³⁷ 1 Samuel 15.33

³⁸ Palm 97.10; Amos 5.15; Romans 12.9

³⁹ Colquhoun, p. 90

⁴⁰ 2 Kings 5.17,18

his idolatry, a more dangerous disease. But... he reserved to himself a liberty to bow in the house of Rimmon... We must cast away all our transgressions and not accept any house of Rimmon. If we ask for a dispensation to go on in any sin for the future, we mock God, and deceive ourselves"⁴¹.

John Owen wrote that repentance must be universal such that "it absolutely excludes all reserves for any sin". Some, he wrote, consider the reserved sin to be "small, and of no great importance... but true repentance respects the nature of sin, which is in every sin equally, the least as well as the greatest". Others, he continued, reserve sins that are secret, "hidden from every eye... but this is an evidence of the grossest hypocrisy, and the highest contempt of God, who seeth in secret"⁴². Jesus was very clear regarding the totality of true repentance when He taught regarding a lustful adulterous eye, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell"⁴³. This forceful language was used by Jesus to emphasize that true repentance dealt not only with the outward act of adultery, but with the inward secret sins in the heart and mind of lust, envy, pride, self-righteousness, malice, earthly-mindedness and other such hidden transgressions.

The true penitent sees all of sin as a barrier in his Christian walk. Like the Apostle John who wrote, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!", he is overwhelmed by the love of God shown to him in Christ Jesus. This sense of awe and thanksgiving for the hope "that we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" provides the underlying desire and motivation such that he "purifies himself, just as He is pure"⁴⁴. Thomas Watson wrote, "He who hates a serpent hates all serpents: 'I hate every false way' (Psalm 119.104). Hypocrites will hate some sins which mar their credit, but a true convert hates all sins, gainful sins, complexion-sins, the very stirrings of corruption"⁴⁵. David not only hated all known sin, but was willing and desirous of submitting himself to God's searching of him to discover what might be any unknown or hidden sin. He prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting", and asked, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me"⁴⁶.

In Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Apollyon encountered Christian in the Valley of Humiliation and attempted through accusation to discourage Christian from persevering in his walk:

Apol. Thou hast already been unfaithful in thy service to him; and how dost thou think to receive Wages of him?

⁴¹ Matthew Henry, *The Bethany Parallel Commentary on the Old Testament*, Bethany House Publishers, 1985, p.695

⁴² John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, The banner of Truth Trust, 1991, Volume XXI, p.28

⁴³ Matthew 5.29

⁴⁴ 1 John 3.1-3

⁴⁵ Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009, p. 46

⁴⁶ Psalm 139.23-24; 19.12-13

Chr. Wherein, O Apollyon! Have I been unfaithful to him?

Apollyon then paraded before him all of his past sins to which Christian replied,

Chr. All this is true, and *much more, which thou hast left out*; but the Prince whom I serve and honour, is merciful and ready to forgive... I have groaned under them, been sorry for them, and have obtained Pardon of my Prince.⁴⁷

In this way, Christian demonstrated the state of mind of a true penitent in confessing not only his more prominent sins, but his willingness to confess and seek pardon for all of them, knowing as Colquhoun put it, "the sin of his nature in general, and the unbelief and legal temper of his heart in particular". We read, "'Now, therefore,' says the Lord, 'Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.' So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm"⁴⁸.

As such, the true penitent, knowing and experiencing the continued presence of the remnants of sin within, sees *repentance as the ongoing tenor of his Christian walk*. He is like Paul who said about himself, "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"⁴⁹. Paul knew he was fully justified before God, having had the righteousness of Christ credited to his account and having had His sins put away at the cross. But he was also anxious to enter into the fullness of his salvation in not only being declared righteous, but in truly being righteous. That was the "prize" he labored to obtain, the working out of his own salvation in fear and trembling which consisted in his daily exercising of faith and repentance as God worked in him both to will and do for His good pleasure.⁵⁰ With Paul, the true penitent knows and takes delight in God's intent towards His children that they "be conformed to the image of His Son"⁵¹. He "watches and strives against all the corruptions of his heart, and labors after increasing conformity to God, in all holy conversation and godliness. He does not renounce one lust and retain another, nor content himself with devotional duties, in neglect of strict honesty and unfeigned benevolence; neither can he rest till this is his rejoicing, even the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, he has his conversation in the world. All the actings of his mind, as well as his external conduct, fall under his cognizance and inspection; and his daily exercise and desire are to improve himself to Him who knows his thoughts afar off"⁵². Calvin referred to this desire in discussing vivification as a part of repentance when he wrote, "It (*vivification*) means... the desire to live in a holy and devoted manner, a desire arising from rebirth; as if it were said that man dies to himself

⁴⁷ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Barbour Publishing, 1985, p. 61-62, (italics mine)

⁴⁸ Joel 2.12-13

⁴⁹ Philippians 3.13-14

⁵⁰ Ibid, 2.12-13

⁵¹ Romans 8.29

⁵² Colquhoun, pgs. 100-101

that he may begin to live to God"⁵³. This is entirely consistent with what the Apostle Paul wrote concerning his experience of new life: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me"⁵⁴. The true penitent will settle for nothing less than full conformity to the Savior he loves. Owen wrote, "There must be no *end of repentance* until there is a *full end of sin*. All tears will not be wiped from our eyes until all sin is perfectly removed from our souls"⁵⁵.

The Pharaoh of Moses' day exhibited a repentance which was only temporary. After the seventh plague of hail, Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, "I have sinned this time" and after the eighth plague of locusts he said to them, "I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and entreat the Lord your God, that He may take away from me this death only"⁵⁶. When the thunder was flashing, the lightening was striking the earth and very great hailstones were falling mixed with fire such as had never been seen before, and when swarms of locusts were devouring the trees left standing after the hail and filling their houses, Pharaoh confessed he had sinned. But when Moses interceded for him with God to stop the hail and remove the locusts, his stubbornness returned as strong as ever, thus showing his repentance to be only temporary. The influences of his hardened heart quickly re-emerged. As Charles Spurgeon put it, "The repentance that was born in the storm died in the calm"⁵⁷. It was a repentance that only wanted the removal of the catastrophic circumstances, not the removal of sin. Adam Clarke wrote, "What a strange case! And what a series of softening and hardening of sinning and repenting! Had he not now another opportunity of returning to God? But the love of gain, and the gratification of his own self-will and obstinacy prevailed"⁵⁸.

This principle of on-going repentance in the true penitent tends to increase as he spiritually matures. God's sanctifying dealings with His children are such He progressively reveals more and more of their corruption as they progress. As such, they come are to see and experience more clearly the great mercy they have been graciously given. Jesus illustrated this on the occasion of the woman "who was a sinner" who washed Jesus' feet. He told his host, Simon the Pharisee, who was offended by the woman, the story of two debtors who were forgiven by their creditor. "Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?", Jesus asked Simon who replied, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more"⁵⁹. The Apostle Paul after contemplating the exceedingly abundant grace and love shown to him in Christ Jesus thank fully wrote, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief"⁶⁰. The prophet Isaiah had a sight of God sitting on His throne with seraphim crying out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts",

⁵³ Inst. III, III, 3

⁵⁴ Galatians 2.20

⁵⁵ Owen, XXI, p.31

⁵⁶ Exodus 9.27; 10.16-17

⁵⁷ Charles Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Sermons*, Baker Books, Volume 3, p. 242

⁵⁸ Adam Clarke, *The Bethany Parallel Commentary on the Old Testament*, Bethany House Publishers, 1985, p. 153

⁵⁹ Luke 7.37,40-43

⁶⁰ 1 Timothy 1.15

and could only say, "Woe is me, for I am undone". He had experienced a complete spiritual unraveling which drove him to a new level of confession: "I am a man of unclean lips". After his lips were touched with a live coal and he was told his iniquity was taken away and his sin purged, the Lord asked, "Whom shall I send?" to which Isaiah displayed his true repentance in answering, "Here am I! Send me"⁶¹. Isaiah had come to a new level of understanding of his sin and corruption. He saw himself as unclean, vile and loathsome. His past sins appeared as more aggravated to him. In referring to his unclean lips, he seemed to more deeply comprehend what Jesus would say: "Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man"⁶². Isaiah recognized that sin was pervasive, and when cleansed, he was more intensely desirous to serve God out of thanksgiving. Concerning this passage, R. C. Sproul wrote, "We are fortunate in one respect: God does not appear to us in the way He appeared to Isaiah. Who could stand it? God normally reveals our sinfulness to us a bit at a time. We experience a gradual recognition of our own corruption. God showed Isaiah his corruption all at once. No wonder that he was ruined"⁶³. More ordinarily, much like the peeling back of the layers of an onion, the true penitent sees more clearly the loathsomeness of past sins and the tremendous degree of purifying that still needs to be brought about. He then comes into a fuller and deeper comprehension of "what is the width and length and depth and height... the love of Christ which passes knowledge"⁶⁴.

Godly Sorrow and Godly Repentance:

In his first letter to the Corinthian church, the Apostle Paul rebuked them for their indifference and lack of discipline towards one of their members who was engaged in a particularly grievous sin. In his second letter, the Apostle wrote, "Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner; What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter"⁶⁵. The Corinthians had responded to Paul's reprimand with a godly sorrow, but their sorrow in and of itself was not repentance, but it worked repentance in that "sorrow on account of sin, which arises from proper apprehensions of God and our relation to Him, necessarily leads to that entire change in the inward life which is expressed by the word repentance, and which is connected with salvation"⁶⁶. *As such, true godly repentance is always preceded by godly sorrow.*

⁶¹ Isaiah 6.1-8

⁶² Matthew 15.11

⁶³ R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, Tyndale House Publishers, 1985, p. 45

⁶⁴ Ephesians 3.18-19

⁶⁵ 2 Corinthians 7.9-11

⁶⁶ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary On 1&2 Corinthians*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994, p.559, Hodge wrote on p. 560 regarding 2 Cor. 7.9-11, "The question may be asked whether Paul means here to describe the uniform effects

Previously, the Corinthians were unconcerned and neglectful regarding their sinning member, but after Paul's censure, they, like the prodigal, came to their senses. From doing nothing, they were stirred up into godly sorrow and action. It was a godly sorrow in that they were anxious to see the wrong made right. Rather than defend themselves out of hurt pride, they were desirous of being looked upon once again favorably by Paul and ultimately God. As such, their sorrow was a sorrow for their misconduct more than it was for the Paul's rebuke which they recognized as having been justly administered. This led them to clear themselves in confession and contempt for their transgression. Sometimes the righting of a wrong may result in the need to make restitution. When the corrupt tax collector Zacchaeus was converted, he said to Jesus, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold"⁶⁷.

Further, once the Corinthians apprehended the seriousness of their neglect in this matter, they became angry with themselves. This kind of self-directed indignation is expressed in Jeremiah where we read, "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself: 'You have chastised me, and I was chastised, like an untrained bull; restore me, and I will return, for You are the Lord my God. Surely, after my turning, I repented; and after I was instructed, I struck myself on the thigh; I was ashamed, yes, even humiliated, because I bore the reproach of my youth'"⁶⁸. Calvin also noted regarding this indignation: "It may, however, be taken here to mean the indignation, with which the Corinthians had been inflamed against the sins of one or a few, whom they had previously spared. Thus they repented of their concurrence or connivance"⁶⁹.

Additionally, their sorrow aroused a reverential fear of God. David in his repentance gave expression to this fear when he wrote, "Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me"⁷⁰. John Calvin wrote, "repentance proceeds from an earnest fear of God. For, before the mind of the sinner inclines to repentance, it must be aroused by thinking on divine judgment. When this thought is deeply and thoroughly fixed in mind—that God will someday mount His judgment seat to demand a reckoning of all words and deeds—it will not permit the miserable man to rest nor to breathe freely even for a moment without stirring him continually to reflect upon another mode of life whereby he may be able to stand firm in that judgment"⁷¹. The Corinthians were also fearful of Paul in the authority of his apostolic office. In his first letter he warned, "What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?"⁷². But there was also the fear of sin itself and the sometimes unexpected power of it still within themselves. The Apostle's rebuke awoke them to the

of genuine repentance, so as to furnish a rule by which each one may judge of his own experience. This, to say the least, is not the primary design of the passage. If it affords such a rule it is only incidentally. The passage is historical. It describes the effects which godly sorrow produced in the Corinthian church".

⁶⁷ Luke 19:8

⁶⁸ Jeremiah 31.18-19

⁶⁹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The Ages Digital Library Commentary, Ver. 1.0, 1998, p. 152

⁷⁰ Psalm 51.11

⁷¹ Insti. III, III, 7

⁷² 1 Corinthians 4.21

tremendous danger of the deceitfulness of sin whereby they had allowed themselves to sink into such a careless, neglectful and lethargic spiritual state. And so they were stirred up to a greater holy watchfulness over themselves and each other.

Their fear then led to a vehement desire not only for the wrong to be made right, but for the restored approval of Paul and the accompanying joy of that restoration. The true penitent abhors the felt sense of a breach with his brothers in Christ and ultimately with God Himself. This is exactly what David experienced in his repentance when he wrote, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation"⁷³. This desire in turn produced an awakened zeal to deal with the offending brother to bring either punishment or restoration, thus desiring to produce real evidence of their repentance. That this zeal was present in dealing with the man is evidenced by the Apostle gently calling the Corinthians "to reaffirm your love to him", telling them that "this punishment... is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow"⁷⁴. However, the Apostle also said of their godly sorrow, "what vindication! (also translated as '*what revenge*')", meaning that "one of the sentiments which godly sorrow had aroused in them was the sense of justice, the moral judgment that sin ought to be punished"⁷⁵. On this same verse Calvin wrote, "They had for some time tolerated incest; but, on being admonished by Paul, they had not merely ceased to countenance him, but had been strict reprovers in chastening him, — this was the *revenge* that was meant"⁷⁶.

By way of contrast, the sorrow and accompanying repentance of Esau was neither true nor godly. Wearied after being in the field, Esau came upon Jacob who was cooking a stew and asked for some to satisfy his hunger. Jacob seized the opportunity by getting Esau to relinquish his birthright as firstborn in exchange: "Jacob said, 'Sell me your birthright as of this day'. And Esau said, 'Look, I am about to die; so what is my birthright to me?' ...thus Esau despised his birthright"⁷⁷. Many years later, "when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears"⁷⁸. Owen wrote, "He esteemed himself the presumptive heir of the patriarchal blessing, and knew not that he had *virtually* renounced it, and *meritoriously* lost it, by selling his birthright"⁷⁹. Although he experienced great sorrow, it was not a sorrow for having offended God; it was not a sorrow for the sin and corruption within himself; it was not a sorrow for the breach in his relationship with God, it was merely the sorrow for the loss of what he perceived to be the temporal blessings of "a flourishing state and condition in this world, in a multiplication of posterity, and power over his enemies, which were express in the promise made unto Abraham, Gen. xxii. 17 ...Sin may be the occasion of great sorrow, where there is no sorrow for sin"⁸⁰. He sought the blessing, but refused to use the

⁷³ Psalm 51.12

⁷⁴ 2 Corinthians 2.6-7

⁷⁵ Hodge, p.562

⁷⁶ Calvin, p.153

⁷⁷ Genesis 25.31-32,34

⁷⁸ Hebrews 12.17

⁷⁹ Owen, XXIII, p.302

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.302, 305

means of attaining it, faith and true repentance. The only repentance or change of mind that he sought was the changing of his father Isaac's mind to bless him instead of Jacob: "Isaac trembled exceedingly, and said, '...I have blessed him—and indeed he shall be blessed'. When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, 'Bless me—me also, O my father'"⁸¹. The subsequent manifestation of Esau's lack of any true repentance in himself was his subsequent desire to kill his brother just as Cain killed Abel out of anger and envy.

Conclusion:

The importance of understanding the nature and personal exercise of true godly repentance cannot be understated. The Apostle Paul proclaimed in Athens, "God... now commands all men everywhere to repent"⁸². Jesus, on the occasion of being told by some of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their own sacrifices, said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish"⁸³.

This true godly repentance is chiefly marked by a thorough hatred of and sorrow for all sin, and an active daily turning from it out of love for God. As such, true godly repentance can only come from spiritual new birth in which one is graciously given a radically changed mind, heart and will. This new life was purchased by Christ at the cross and secured in His resurrection. Godly repentance therefore "instead of being a condition upon which salvation is suspended it is a part of salvation; of that whole salvation, which is bestowed as an absolutely free gift on sinners infinitely unworthy of it"⁸⁴. Godly repentance is not a one time event, but an on-going practice through out the Christian's life, and is a means of progressing in sanctification. As such, its presence in the life of the believer provides evidence of regeneration, and confidence that their salvation has not only begun, but is progressing to its consummation. Like the Apostle Paul, the true penitent says, "I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me"⁸⁵.

⁸¹ Genesis 27.33-34

⁸² Acts 17.30

⁸³ Luke 13.2

⁸⁴ Colquhoun, p. 64

⁸⁵ Philippians 3.12