

## The Difference Between True and Counterfeit Repentance

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John Colquhoun was born in Scotland in January 1748. His early education was from the local school supported by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK). At the age of 20, Colquhoun began his studies at the University of Glasgow. Once his pastoral ministry began, he labored faithfully for almost 50 years, and died in 1827. He was one of the greatest of Scottish preachers and writers. His works, include: *A Treatise on the Covenant of Grace*, *A Catechism for the Instruction and Direction of Young Communicants*, *A View of Saving Faith*, *A Collection of the Promises of the Gospel*, *A View of Evangelical Repentance*, *Spiritual Comfort*, and a collection of sermons entitled *Sermons, Chiefly on Doctrinal Subjects*.

IT IS A TRUTH CLEARLY REVEALED AND OFTEN inculcated in Scripture that without repentance a man cannot attain eternal life in heaven. The most of men, therefore, who read and hear the Gospel admit that repentance is necessary to their future safety and felicity. But while they believe that it cannot be well with them except they repent, they resolve with a fatal precipitance to call something by this name which bears only a faint resemblance to it; and then they flatter themselves that this base counterfeit will not only be acceptable to God but will even recommend them to His favour. Persuading themselves that they have already repented, they compose themselves to sleep on the pillow of carnal security; and they will not believe that any of the dreadful threatenings denounced in Scripture against impenitent sinners belongs to them. Thus many 'go down to the grave with a lie in their right hand.' They obstinately refuse to be convinced of their fatal mistake till they begin to lift up their despairing eyes in torment. That my reader may not through ignorance deceive himself with a repentance which must be repented of, I shall endeavour to show him the difference between a true and a counterfeit repentance, as distinctly and plainly as I can, under the following particulars:

1. *False repentance flows from a counterfeit faith of the law as a covenant of works; but true repentance follows a true faith both of the law and of the gospel.*

False repentance arises from a counterfeit faith of the violated law in its covenant form. Hence it is often styled legal repentance, and the conviction of sin which

excites it, legal conviction. It flows from that temporary faith of the commands and curses of the broken law, which a legalist, when his conscience is at any time alarmed, reluctantly exercises. When the holy law strikes his conscience, he is forced to believe that it requires from him perfect obedience as the condition of life, and that its tremendous curse for innumerable instances of disobedience is pronounced against him.<sup>1</sup> he righteous law claims perfect obedience as due from him and condemns him for his disobedience. His awakened conscience concurs with the precept and curse of the law, so that he begins to be greatly alarmed. The only refuge from the curse of the law to which he has recourse in order to pacify his guilty conscience, to satisfy Divine justice, and to lay a foundation of hope, is resolutions, reformations, duties, and other self-righteous schemes. The defects of his endeavours and attainments create new fears; these fears excite new endeavours; and thus the legal penitent goes on, without attaining to the law of righteousness, because he 'seeks it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law.'<sup>2</sup> As he may at the same time have a temporary faith of the Gospel, he may pretend some regard to Christ in this his legal progress. He may hope that God, for the sake of Christ, will accept his repentance and forgive his sins. And what is this but a secret hope that the redemption of Jesus Christ will impart such merit to his tears, reformations, and works, as will make them effectual to atone for his sins, and to purchase the favour of God? He cannot trust that God will shew mercy to him, till, by his penitence and reformation, he recommend himself to His favour.

On the other hand, the characters of true repentance are directly opposite to those now mentioned. It follows a sincere, a spiritual faith, both of the law and of the Gospel. Whilst a true conviction of sin and misery flows from a spiritual belief of the law with application to oneself, a true sense of sin, from which genuine repentance springs, arises from a sincere faith, both of the law and of the gospel. It is the immediate consequence of a sincere faith of pardoning mercy. 'There is forgiveness with thee,' says the Psalmist, 'that thou mayest be feared.'<sup>3</sup> Godly sorrow for sin, and turning from the love and practice of sin to the love and practice of holiness, flow, as was stated above, from reliance on the righteousness of Jesus Christ for all our title to pardon and sanctification, and from trusting in Him for pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace. Hence it is called evangelical repentance. The acting of true faith produces, in order of nature, the exercise of this repentance. He who would repent acceptably must first believe in Christ that he may so repent.<sup>4</sup> He must believe that there is safety in entrusting his guilty soul to Christ before he can, with sincerity and good courage, turn from

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<sup>1</sup> Gal. 3. 10

<sup>2</sup> Rom. 9. 31, 32

<sup>3</sup> Psa. 130.4

<sup>4</sup> Heb. 11. 6; Acts 11. 21

all sin to God in Him. He must be united to Christ by faith, as the branch to the vine, before he can bring forth such fruit as is meet for repentance. Accordingly, the true penitent approaches to a gracious God with deep convictions of his guilt and of his desert of eternal rejection from Him; but then, he comes before a mercy-seat. He relies on the blood of Jesus Christ for purification from his innumerable sins; and from that he takes encouragement to mourn before the Lord, and to express himself in the language of the royal penitent, 'Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.' 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.'<sup>5</sup> That is the prospect which both encourages and invigorates his humble supplications for mercy and grace. That is it which embitters all his sins to him, which makes him loathe them and long earnestly for complete deliverance from the love and practice of them.

Here, the attentive reader cannot but discern the difference, nay contrariety, between a guilty flight from God, like that of Adam after his fall, and a humbling, self-condemning approach to His pardoning mercy, like that of the prodigal when returning to his father's house; between slavish and proud endeavours to atone for our sins, and to make our peace with God by our own righteousness, and resorting solely to the blood of Christ for cleansing from all sin. Similarly he sees the difference between mourning for our own danger by sin, and mourning for our sins themselves as the basest injuries done to God and Christ, and to the mercy and love which were displayed to us in Christ. And again, he sees the difference between attempting a new life by the strength of our own resolutions and endeavours, and trusting only in the mercy of the Lord Jesus for sanctifying as well as for justifying grace.

*2. Counterfeit repentance proceeds only from a sense of danger and a dread of wrath; but true repentance is a sincere mourning for sin, a loathing of ourselves in our own sight for it, and an earnest desire of deliverance from the power and practice of it.*

In false repentance the sinner is most affected with the dreadful consequences of his transgression;<sup>6</sup> but in evangelical or true repentance the believer is chiefly affected with the malignity and odiousness of sin itself as contrary to the holy nature and law of God.<sup>7</sup>

In false repentance the conscience of the sinner is alarmed by a sense of his dreadful guilt and danger; and then it cannot but remonstrate loudly against those sins which threaten him with intolerable and eternal torment. Hence those terrors

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<sup>5</sup> Psa. 51. 2, 10

<sup>6</sup> Isa. 59. 9-12

<sup>7</sup> Luke 15. 21

which are frequently found among awakened sinners under apprehensions of approaching death. At such times their innumerable sins stare them in the face, and their high aggravations are remembered with bitter remorse. Conscience draws up the indictment and brings home the charge against them. The violated law condemns them without mercy. And what have they now in prospect? What but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation to devour them? Now, with what deep distress will they cry out and howl upon their beds because of the heinousness and demerit of their sins! With what amazement will they expect the tremendous outcome of their sinful course! How ready will they now be to make resolutions of beginning a humble, a circumspect, a holy life! Under this their terror, conscience like a flaming sword keeps them from their former course of impiety and sensuality.

And what is all this repentance, but the fear of the worm that never dies, and of the fire that shall never be quenched? 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,<sup>8</sup> 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. It is true, this legal terror is, in many of the elect, a preparative to evangelical repentance. Many true penitents were, sometime, in the same distressing circumstances and at first began from no better principle than self-love to flee from the wrath to come.

It was said that false repentance proceeds only from a sense of danger and a dread of impending wrath. The character of true repentance is the very reverse. Sin itself becomes the heaviest burden, and the object of the greatest abhorrence and dread, to the sincere penitent. As evangelical repentance flows from the faith of pardoning mercy, the fear of hell, though it may sometimes accompany godly sorrow for sin, yet forms no part of this repentance. Godly sorrow springs from an affecting and humbling sense of the dishonour and injury which the true penitent sees he has done to a gracious God by his transgression in the first Adam, by the sin of his nature, and the innumerable evils of his life. This is the grievance, this the distress, of every true penitent. His language runs like this: — 'I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before me.' 'Mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as an heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.' 'Deliver me from all my transgressions.' 'Let not any iniquity have dominion over me.' 'Innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than

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<sup>8</sup> 2 Pet. 2. 22

the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me. Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me: O Lord, make haste to help me.’<sup>9</sup> Here we see that the sincere penitent mourns for and abhors all his lusts, whether of the flesh or of the mind, and longs to be completely delivered from them. He is willing that none should be spared, no, not even a right hand or a right eye.

How great and obvious, then, is the difference between being struck with dread, restrained by terror, or driven from a course of sinning by the lashes of an awakened conscience; between this, I say, and loathing ourselves in our own sight for our iniquities and abominations, and vehemently desiring grace to mortify our corruption that we may be freed from the power of sin! The former is merely the fruit of self-love which urges the soul to flee from danger; the latter is the exercise of a vital principle which separates the soul from sin, and engages the whole man in a persevering opposition to it.

*3. In false penitence the sinner is chiefly affected 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.*

In counterfeit repentance the sinner is affected chiefly with his gross and open abominations, and with the connection of endless punishment with them. It is the recollection of his gross and scandalous crimes that fills him with remorse and dread; and it is not so much his view of these abominations themselves that fills him with regret and distress, as his prospect of punishment for them both in time and in eternity. It is their connection with present reproach and with future torment that usually fills his mind with the keenest anguish. Such was the repentance of Cain. After his murder of his brother Abel, he said, ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear:’ or rather as in the margin, — ‘Mine iniquity is greater than that it may be forgiven.’<sup>10</sup> He did not say, My iniquities, the innumerable sins of which I have hitherto been guilty; but, ‘my iniquity,’ the crime of murder only. Such also was the repentance of Judas the traitor. He said to the chief priests and elders, ‘I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.’<sup>11</sup> It was not for his covetousness, hypocrisy, and other innumerable sins that he appeared to feel remorse, but only for his having betrayed the innocent blood. It was for this most atrocious crime, and this only, together with the sure prospect of endless punishment, that he felt such anguish of mind as was insupportable; for ‘he went and hanged himself.’ Of the same character is the repentance of multitudes at this day.

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<sup>9</sup> Psa. 51. 3; 38. 4; 119. 133; 40. 12-13

<sup>10</sup> Gen. 4. 13

<sup>11</sup> Matt. 27. 4

On the other hand, in true repentance the believer is ordinarily most affected with a spiritual view of his secret evils; the sin of his nature in general, and the unbelief and legal temper of his heart in particular. And of all his actual transgressions, the remembrance of none usually affects him so deeply as that of his own iniquity, his constitution-sin, the sin which in times past most easily beset him, and most frequently enslaved him. He is affected with sorrow and self-loathing for all his actual sins; but it is a spiritual view of this sin that commonly fills him with the deepest abasement and the keenest contrition. And whilst, with holy abhorrence of all iniquity, he turns from it to God, he sets himself with peculiar vigilance and diligence against this sin.<sup>12</sup>

*4. Counterfeit penitence has no true connection with the pardon of sin in justification; but true repentance is a necessary consequence of that act of pardon.*

Legal repentance is not connected with the judicial pardon of sin; for it is the repentance of one who is under the curse of the law as a covenant of works, and therefore under the dominion of sin. It is the repentance of a man who is under the condemning sentence of the broken law, which is the strength of sin; and therefore it is far from being spiritually good and acceptable to God. It is the repentance of an unbeliever; and 'without faith it is impossible to please God.'<sup>13</sup> In brief, it is the repentance of a man whose sins are not pardoned, and whose person is not accepted as righteous before God in justification. And as acceptance, according to the covenant of grace, must begin at the person, and then go on to his performances, so, that repentance which does not flow from justification is counterfeit: it has nothing in it that is spiritually good and acceptable to God.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, true repentance is a necessary fruit of pardon and acceptance as righteous in justification; and therefore the exercise of it is spiritually good and acceptable to the Lord. The believer is freely pardoned, and made accepted in the Beloved;<sup>15</sup> and therefore Divine acceptance proceeds from his person to his exercise of repentance. Because he himself is accepted as righteous, his repentance is accepted as sincere. It is a necessary consequence and evidence of God's judicial pardon of sin in the act of justification; and it is an appointed mean of the renewed intimations of it, and also of fatherly pardon, or the removal of paternal chastisement for sin. 'I have blotted out,' says Jehovah,

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<sup>12</sup> Psa. 51. 5-7; Rom. 7. 23, 24; Heb. 12. 1

<sup>13</sup> Heb. 11. 6

<sup>14</sup> Acts 2. 37; Rom. 7. 8-13

<sup>15</sup> Eph. 1.6

'as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me, for I have redeemed thee.'<sup>16</sup> And again, 'Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings;'<sup>17</sup> — I as a Father will forgive them, and restore your souls. Although the exercise of evangelical repentance is impossible under legal guilt, which tends to the destruction of the sinner, and binds him under the dominion of sin,<sup>18</sup> yet it frequently exists under that guilt which exposes the believer to God's fatherly anger, which anger implies love to his person, and tends to his advancement in the love and practice of holiness.<sup>19</sup>

*5. False penitence commonly issues from discouragement and despondency, but true repentance from encouraging hope.*

Many legal penitents, indeed, by their external reformation do pacify their alarmed consciences, settle upon their lees, and cry, Peace, peace to their souls; and so, their discouragement and repentance both come to an end. But while their anxious concern remains, their desponding fear is the very life of it. Their innumerable and heinous crimes appear dreadful to their alarmed consciences, as they cannot but know that they frequently violate their promises of new and universal obedience. They are therefore afraid that God will never pardon and accept such perfidious rebels as they have been. And though they dare not neglect religious duties, yet they come with horror into the presence of the Lord, as into that of an inexorable judge, an infinite enemy. Thus they have nothing to keep them from sinking into absolute despair but their good resolutions and endeavours, which yet are too defective to be a ground of comfortable hope. Now what is all this but, with base ingratitude, to undervalue the spotless righteousness of Jesus Christ, to limit the boundless grace and mercy of God, and implicitly to deny the truth of the blessed gospel? They flee from the mercy of God our Saviour, while they pretend to flee to it.

On the other hand, though the true penitent has a deeper sense of the atrociousness of his sins, and of the greatness of his guilt, than any false penitent can have, yet he dares not yield to despairing thoughts of redeeming mercy. He is enabled to trust in the mercy of God his Saviour; and his exercise of faith opens the door of hope, and therefore the door of repentance. It is granted that he may labour for a time under many discouraging fears, but these are his infirmity, not his repentance. He exercises a living hope, and that gives life and activity to every other grace, and to repentance in particular.

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<sup>16</sup> Isa. 44. 22

<sup>17</sup> Jer. 3.22

<sup>18</sup> 1 Cor. 15. 56; Rom. 7. 6, 8

<sup>19</sup> Jer. 31. 18-20; Heb. 12. 6-11; Rev. 3. 19

Here it may be observed that, though a fear and jealousy of one's own sincerity may be consistent with the exercise of true repentance, yet all doubts of the freeness of gospel-offers and of the faithfulness of gospel-promises, all fears of his not being elected, of his having sinned away the day of grace, or of his having sinned against the Holy Spirit, all apprehensions that his sins are so aggravated, so atrocious, as not to admit of pardoning mercy — these are inconsistent with, and destructive of the exercise of it. The evangelical penitent looks over the highest mountains that are raised before him — the greatness of his transgressions, the plagues of his heart, the temptations of Satan — to infinite mercy. Thither he will fly. In that he will hope, though his case seem ever so dark, and though every thing appear to turn against him. And the more lively his hope is, the more humbled and grieved he is for his iniquities, and the more vigorous his endeavours are after new obedience.

Since true repentance is a hatred of, and a departure from all sin, it must surely be an abhorrence of, and a flight from unbelief and despair, the greatest of all sins. It is not, therefore, sufficient for the true penitent to believe that God is infinitely gracious and merciful, that the righteousness of Christ is infinitely meritorious, that there is forgiveness with God for the worst of sinners, and that Christ with His righteousness and fulness is freely offered in the Gospel to sinners in common.

He must believe all this with application to himself. And in order to his approaching to God as a Father, in order to his being in love with the ways of God, and to his serving Him with cheerfulness and delight, he must likewise trust in the Lord Jesus for his whole salvation. This firm trust in the mercy of God his Saviour is not only requisite in order to the first exercise of true repentance, but the sincere penitent will invariably find, that when he at any time yields to a despondent frame, he is hereby rendered incapable of godly sorrow for sin, of delight in God, and of the spiritual performance of any duty. The sincere penitent should, indeed, be jealous and distrustful of himself, but he must not distrust the compassionate Saviour, nor despond, if he would maintain the exercise of evangelical repentance, or of any other spiritual grace.

The difference, then, between a false and a true repentance is as great as between desponding fear and encouraging hope; as between being affrighted by a sight of our sins from trusting in God, and from serving Him with delight, and our being allured by His infinite mercy to seek His face, to expect forgiveness through the blood of His dear Son, and to serve Him with the dispositions of children.

*6. Counterfeit repentance springs from enmity to God and to His holy law, but true repentance from love to both.*

The grief and terror which legal penitents often feel arise from dreadful apprehensions of God and of His inflexible justice. They know that they have

greatly provoked Him. They are afraid of His infinite wrath, and therefore are eager to obtain a covert from it. Previously it may be, they have had some pleasing apprehensions of God, while they considered Him as all mercy, and while, though yet living in their sins, they entertained a hope of pardon. But now that they have alarming apprehensions of His infinite holiness and justice, and because He appears an infinite enemy to them, they are contriving some way to make peace with Him; for they are afraid that, if the controversy proceed, it will issue in their eternal destruction. They resolve upon obedience to Him from the same motives from which slaves obey their tyrannical masters, even though the rule of their obedience is directly contrary to the inclination of their hearts. Were the penalty of the law taken away, their enmity to it would quickly appear. They would soon again with the same pleasure as formerly, embrace their beloved lusts.

The truth of this assertion is frequently witnessed in those who throw off their convictions and reformations together, and who, notwithstanding their appearance of religion, manifest by their sinful and sensual lives the reigning enmity of their hearts to God and His holy law. They still show themselves to be enemies in their minds by their wicked works.<sup>20</sup> As for their sorrow on account of their sins, such penitents are very sorry that God hates sin so exceedingly that He is resolved to punish it with the everlasting destruction of the impenitent sinner, and that He is able to execute this purpose, in spite of the strongest opposition. They are also extremely sorry, as was hinted above, that His law is so very strict, and that the punishment threatened for sin is so terribly severe; but they are far from being grieved in heart for the base, the ungrateful part they have acted, by sinning against a gracious God and violating His holy law.

The true penitent, on the contrary, mourns, not because the law is very strict or its penalty very severe; for he esteems the law to be holy, and the commandment to be holy, and just, and good. But he grieves that, though the law is spiritual, yet he is carnal, sold under sin. He mourns that his nature has been so contrary to God, that his practice has been so opposite to His will, and that he makes no better progress in mortifying the deeds of the body of sin, and in regulating his affections by the Word of God. He breathes with the same earnestness after sanctification as after freedom from eternal wrath. He loves God and His holy law; and therefore he does not desire that the law should be bent to his corruptions, but that his heart and life should be fully subjected to the law as the rule of his duty. He longs for nothing so much as redemption from sin, proficiency in faith and holiness, and a life of communion with Christ, and with God in Him.

The difference, then, between a false penitent and a true one is very great. The former looks upon God with terror and aversion, but the latter mourns his distance from Him, and desires earnestly to be transformed into His likeness.

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<sup>20</sup> Col. 1. 21

The one still loves his sins in his heart, and mourns that there is a law to condemn, and justice to punish him for them; but the other hates all his iniquities without reserve, and because they are contrary to the holy nature and law of God, he is weary under the burden of them. The obedience of the former is by mere constraint, but the imperfections of the latter are such ground of continual humiliation to him as makes him constantly aspire after higher degrees of faith and holiness. The one finds no inward and abiding complacency in the service of God: the other accounts it his happiness, and takes more pleasure in spiritual obedience than in any thing else. In a word, the repentance of the former arises from enmity to God and to His holy law; but the repentance of the latter flows from faith working by love to God and His law.

*7. False repentance produces only a partial and external reformation, but true repentance is a total change of heart, and a universal turning from sin to God.*

As some particular gross iniquity commonly leads the way to that distress or terror which is the evidence of a legal and false repentance, so a reformation with respect to such sins too frequently wears off the impression, and gives rest to the troubled conscience without any further change; or at least, some darling lust will be retained, some right hand or right eye spared. If the false penitent be deterred from sins of commission, he will still live in the omission or careless performance of known duty; or if he be zealous for the duties respecting the worship of God, he will still live in acts of injustice, strife, and uncharitableness toward men. If he reveals some activity in contending for the truths of the Gospel, his heart will still cleave to the world, and he will pursue it as the object of his chief desire and supreme delight. If he make conscience of refraining from every open sin, he yet little regards the sins of his heart, such as silent envy, secret pride, self-righteousness, self-preference, earthly-mindedness, malice, unbelief, or some other secret abominations. Whatever progress he may seem to make in religion, his heart is still estranged from the power of godliness. Like Ephraim, he is as 'a cake not turned,'<sup>21</sup> neither dough nor bread; or like Laodicea, lukewarm, 'neither cold nor hot.'<sup>22</sup> His mind is not changed with regard to sin. He does not sincerely grieve that ever he committed it, nor does he really wish it undone. He does not heartily abhor it, nor is he ever willing to be finally divorced from it.

The character of the true penitent is directly the reverse of this. He finds, indeed, as has already been observed, continual occasion to lament the great imperfections of his heart and life; and accordingly he relies for renewed pardon on the righteousness of Christ and on the promises of God. But though he has not already attained, neither is already perfect, yet he presses on towards perfection. He watches and strives against all the corruptions of his heart, and

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<sup>21</sup> Hos. 7. 8

<sup>22</sup> Rev. 3. 15

labours after increasing conformity to God, in all holy conversation and godliness.<sup>23</sup> He does not renounce one lust and retain another, nor content himself with devotional duties, in the 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 approve himself to Him who knows his thoughts afar off. His reformation extends, not only to the devotion of the church, but to that of his family and his closet; not only to his conversation, but to his tempers and affections, and to the duties of every relation which he sustains among men. His repentance produces heavenly-mindedness, humility, meekness, charity, patience, forgiveness of injuries, and self-denial; and it is accompanied by all the other graces and fruits of the Holy Spirit. And in order to be satisfied as to the truth of his repentance, he examines the motives which prevail with him to turn from sin to God for he knows that the mean motives which rise no higher than himself and his own safety can never denominate him a true penitent.

The difference, then, between a false and a true repentance is exceedingly great. The former is only an external reformation, devoid of all spiritual grace, but the latter is an internal change of the will and affections, as well as of the outward conduct, a change which is accompanied by all the graces and fruits of the blessed Spirit. The one aims at so much religion only as will keep the mind easy, and calm the tumults of an awakened conscience: the other aims at a holy, humble, and spiritual walk with God, and rests in no degree of conformity to Christ short of perfection.

*8. Once more, counterfeit repentance is only temporary, and it wears off with those convictions of conscience which have occasioned it; but true repentance is the continued exercise of the sincere believer.*

We have frequent instances of persons who for a while appear under the bitterest remorse for their sins, and yet afterwards wear off all their impressions, and return to the same course of impiety and sensuality which occasioned their distress and terror. They hereby declare to the world that their goodness, like that of Ephraim, was but as a morning cloud, and an early dew, which soon pass away. And beside these, there seem to be some who quiet their consciences, and speak peace to their souls, from their having been in distress and terror on

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<sup>23</sup> The emperor Sigismund having, in a sore fit of sickness, made fair promises of amendment of life, asked Theodoric, Archbishop of Cologne how he might know whether his repentance was sincere. The Archbishop replied, 'If you are as careful to perform in your health, as you are forward to promise in your sickness, you may safely draw that inference.'

account of their sins, from their reformation from certain gross immoralities, and from their formal course of duties. They have repented, they think, and therefore conclude that they are at peace with God; and they seem to have no great concern about either their former impieties or their present iniquities. They conclude that they are converted, and that their state is good and therefore they are secure and dwell at ease. They often think, and perhaps speak, loftily of their experiences. They are elated with joyful apprehensions of the safety of their state and of the goodness of their heart; but they have no humbling impressions of their sins, and no godly sorrow, either for the depravity of their natures, or the imperfection of their duties, or the multitude of their provocations.

Many, whilst under the stings of an awakened conscience, are driven to maintain a solemn watch over their hearts and their lives, to be afraid of every sin, and to be in appearance very conscientious, serious, and even zealous, in the performance of known duties. By this imaginary progress in religion they gradually wear out their convictions, and get over their legal terrors; and then their apparent watchfulness and tenderness of conscience are forgotten. They attend to their duties in a careless manner, with a trifling and remiss frame of soul, while the great concerns of an eternal world are but little in their thoughts. All their religion is reduced to a lifeless, a cold form. They still maintain the form, but appear quite unconcerned about the power of godliness. Besides, false penitents commonly suffer themselves to be basely overcome by the fear of man. They begin seemingly to repent, but loving the praise of man, and not being able to endure the contempt and reviling of the profane for their professed attachment to Christ, they turn away from the holy commandment. The men with whom they are connected, or to whom they are related, or on whom they depend, must at all hazards be respected and pleased.

Evangelical repentance, on the contrary, is a lasting principle. The true penitent loathes and condemns himself daily. Every day he laments and abhors all the evils which he discovers both in his heart and in his life. He does not forget his former sins, nor become unconcerned about them, as soon as he attains peace of conscience and a joyful hope of his reconciliation to God. But the clearer his evidences of the Divine favour are, the more does he loathe and condemn himself for his iniquities, the more vile in his own sight does he appear, and the more aggravated and odious do his past sins appear to him. The faith and sense of pardoning mercy made Paul appear in his own eyes the chief of sinners. The true penitent continues not only to mourn and to abhor himself for his past abominations, but he always finds new cause for the exercise of repentance. He finds daily so much unbelief, legality, and earthly-mindedness in his heart; so much deadness, formality, and hypocrisy in his duties; and so much prevalence of evil inclinations, vain thoughts, inordinate affections, and of the sin which so easily besets him, that he cannot, while he is in this tabernacle, but groan being burdened.<sup>24</sup> Repentance, therefore, is the constant exercise of the true Christian

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<sup>24</sup> 2 Cor. 5.4

as long as he is in this world. He will not leave off repenting till he perfectly leaves off sinning. He carries the exercise of repentance about with him as long as he carries about the body of sin.<sup>25</sup> Sin follows him whilst he is fleeing from it; often it overtakes him, and therefore he must often renew his flight. For conscience' sake he will forgo temporal advantages, and break through the ties even of sweetest friendship and of nearest kindred, sooner than be drawn back by either into his former neglect of duty. He will maintain a godly jealousy over all persons and things connected with him, lest any of them prove a hindrance to him in his course of new obedience.

Thus it is manifest that the difference between a false and a true repentance is as great as between the running of water in the paths, after a heavy shower, and the streams flowing continually from a living fountain. A false and legal repentance continues no longer than the legal terrors which occasion it, whereas an evangelical repentance is a continued war against sin, until death sound this enemy's retreat. So much for the difference between a true and a counterfeit repentance.

From what has now been stated, the reader may see the difference between true and counterfeit humiliation. Ahab humbled himself from a sense of the danger and a dread of the consequences of sin; but the sincere penitent is humbled from an affecting sense of the malignity, odiousness, and demerit of sin.<sup>26</sup> The former had not a true sense of sin, and therefore, under all his pretended humiliation, the pride of his heart retained its complete dominion over him; whereas the latter has a true sight and feeling of the evil and loathsomeness of sin, and therefore he lies low in the dust before God. As an evidence that the pride of his heart is mortified, he sees, abhors and bitterly bewails it. A slave may stoop for fear of the lash, but it is the disposition of a son to be affected with sorrow and self-abasement for any offence he has given to a kind father. The legal penitent may seem very humble under a sense of the evil which his sin has done to himself, whilst his heart is far from being suitably affected with the injury which it has done to the manifested glory of God. He will be deeply affected under an apprehension of God's terrible wrath, whilst his heart is far from being touched with His love.

If the true penitent does evil he takes the blame to himself, but if he does good he gives the praise to God. 'I laboured more abundantly than they all,' says our Apostle; 'yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.'<sup>27</sup> The false penitent, on the contrary, lays the blame of the evil that he does upon others and takes the praise of the good which he does to himself. He who is truly humbled, conscious

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<sup>25</sup> Rom. 7. 24

<sup>26</sup> Job 42. 5, 6

<sup>27</sup> 1 Cor. 15. 10

that he has no righteousness of his own, flies to the mercy, and submits to the righteousness of Jesus Christ, as the sole ground of his justification. This is that distinguishing character of evangelical humiliation to which the legal penitent cannot produce the smallest claim. The former is made willing to receive the whole of Christ's salvation as an absolutely free gift, whereas the latter is disposed to receive only a part of it, and that upon the ground of his own repentance and faith.

Hence also we may discern what we are to understand by the sorrow of the world. 'Godly sorrow,' says the apostle Paul, 'worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death.'<sup>28</sup> How great is the difference between the sorrow of the evangelical and that of the legal penitent! The one is a sorrow according to God: the other is the sorrow of the world. The former works repentance unto life: the latter works death. Now what is the sorrow of the world? It is that legal sorrow, accompanied by horror of conscience, which the men of the world sometimes have and which arises from a dread of God as a vindictive Judge, ready to take vengeance on them for their crimes, and that, without any apprehension of His mercy in Christ. This is nothing but the beginning of eternal death, of inconceivable and endless anguish in the fire that shall never be quenched. It is also that impatient vexation which worldlings often feel for the loss of worldly things or for disappointment in the gratification of worldly lusts. Now this sorrow likewise works death, temporal and eternal death. It often brings diseases on the body which terminate in death; and sometimes, as in the case of Ahithophel and Judas, it makes men lay violent hands upon themselves. It works in them a dreadful apprehension of eternal death, and, if sovereign grace prevent not, issues in it. The sorrow of the world is indeed a killing sorrow. While it is prejudicial to the precious soul, it injures the body and hastens death. Reader, the more godly sorrow for sin you attain, the more shall you be elevated above worldly sorrow. The former is the antidote to the latter. And if you would advance in the exercise of godly sorrow, trust firmly in Jesus Christ for pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace, and see that your grief on any worldly account always terminates in sorrow for sin.

From what has been said it is evident that a legal repentance is very far from being a true one. It is far from being spiritual and acceptable to the Lord; and therefore, a man may attain the highest degree of it and after all perish as Cain, Pharaoh, and Judas did. It fills, indeed, the conscience with trouble under the dread of God's infinite wrath, but it leaves the heart under the dominion and love of sin. In the exercise of legal repentance, the sinner mourns for sin only as it has wounded his own soul; which shows that his remorse flows merely from a natural spring, and rises only to a natural height. But in the exercise of evangelical repentance, the believer mourns for sin as it has wounded his dear Redeemer, as it has pierced that heart which loves him, and spilled that blood which

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<sup>28</sup> 2 Cor. 2. 10

redeems him. This is an evidence that his sorrow for sin has its spring above nature, and that it rises to a supernatural height. Legal repentance springs only from nature and in its exercise rises no higher than depraved nature. True repentance, on the contrary, proceeds from the grace of Christ and in its exercise aims chiefly at the glory of Christ, and of God in Him. Ah, how blind must that sinner be who mistakes a legal for an evangelical repentance, and who flatters himself that he is in a state of salvation merely because he exercises a natural and legal repentance!

In conclusion: It is evident from what has been stated, that great care is requisite for distinguishing well between true repentance and that which is legal and counterfeit. This is of immense importance, seeing that many who live and die impenitent sometimes appeared penitent, both in their own view and in that of others. True repentance, as already observed, is a change of mind, inclination, and affection, with respect to sin, to God and His law, to Christ and His gospel, and to the sinner himself. From this change proceed godly sorrow for sin, detestation of it, and turning from it to the love, service, and enjoyment of God in Christ. Without this supernatural change and its immediate effects, no other appearances, whether of legal terror, or of supposed humiliation, whilst all sin is not hated and forsaken, nor universal holiness loved and practised, are sincere or acceptable to God. A man may mourn bitterly for sin and yet not mourn spiritually for it. True mourning for sin is more for the evil that is in it than for the evil which comes by it; more because it dishonours God and wounds Christ and grieves the Holy Spirit, and deprives the soul of the image of God, than because it exposes the soul to eternal punishment. A man may also hate sin and yet be far from exercising true repentance. He may abhor iniquity more in others than in himself, whereas the true penitent hates sin more in himself than in any other.

A man may abhor sin more for the shame which attends it than for the malignity and odiousness which are in it; and he may hate one sin because it is contrary to another which he loves dearly. The sincere penitent, on the contrary, hates all sin as sin, and abhors it chiefly for the evil that is in it. A man may even forsake most of his transgressions without exercising true repentance. If he forsake open, and yet retain secret sins, or if he leave sin and yet continue to love it, or if he let one sin go in order to hold another the faster, or if he forsake sin, but not as sin, he is not a true penitent. He who forsakes any sin as sin, or because it is sin, relinquishes all sin. The sincere penitent forsakes all iniquity from right principles, by right motives, in a right manner, and to a right end. Let every man take heed, then, that he do not impose upon himself by mistaking a false for a true repentance. And if he begin to suspect that his repentance is legal and counterfeit, let him without delay trust cordially in Jesus Christ for grace to exercise evangelical repentance.

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