

# The Basis of Salvation

by Charles Ewing Brown

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*The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the fundamental teaching of historic Christianity, and it is the basis of salvation for all men.*

**Scripture:** John 1:29, Romans 5:8, Ephesians 1:7, Philippians 2:6, Colossians 1:14, Hebrews 2:14, 1 Peter 1:18, 1 John 1:7, Revelation 1:5

**Topics:** "Atonement Theology", "Salvation Doctrine"

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## Description

Charles Ewing Brown preaches about the fundamental teaching of salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, emphasizing that salvation is the result of Christ's entire life and work, from incarnation to resurrection. The redemption of mankind is traced to Christ's sacrificial work, likened to a lamb under the ancient temple order. The sermon delves into various theories of atonement, from Christ's ransom to Satan to Anselm's debt payment doctrine, highlighting the orthodox interpretation of salvation through Christ's sacrifice. Brown explores the concept of universal atonement, stressing that Christ died for all men, offering salvation to every individual through His sacrifice.

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## Transcript

If there is one doctrine upon which all historic Christianity is agreed it is the fundamental teaching that salvation is made available to mankind through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This sacrifice is usually taken to mean the whole history of Christ's incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection, although frequently only one aspect of this divine drama is taken as representative of them all. That salvation is the result of the entire life and work of Christ is evident in the language of Paul, said of Christ Jesus: "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:6-11). This passage traces the redemption of mankind to the entire work of Christ in all his incarnation, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension to glory. In his redemption work Christ is likened to a sacrificial lamb under the ancient temple order: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). This was no doubt an allusion to the ritual ordained in Exodus: "Now this is that which thou shalt offer upon the altar; two lambs of the first year day by day continually. The one lamb thou shalt offer in the

morning; and the other lamb thou shalt offer at even" (29:38-39). The prophet Isaiah proclaimed that the suffering Messiah should be brought as a lamb to the slaughter (Isa. 53:7), and the Book of Revelation represents Christ as "a Lamb slain" (5:6) and "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (13:8). "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (I Pet. 1:18-20). Moreover, this is Christ's own interpretation of his work, for he said: "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" (John 6:51, 53). "But God commendeth his love toward us," says Paul, "in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life (Rom. 5:8-10). The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews voices the same truth: "Since the children then share blood and flesh, he himself participated in their nature, so that by dying he might crush him who wields the power of death (that is to say, the devil) and release from thralldom those who lay under a life-long fear of death" (Heb. 2:14-15, Moffatt). I have quoted Moffatt here as he properly translates the Greek word for "destroy," showing that it does not mean that Christ annihilates the devil by his atoning death, but rather that he crushed him and breaks his power over those who trust in Christ for salvation. Paul repeats this theme very often. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins" is an expression found in Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:14. "If we walk in the light," writes John, "as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7). Here "blood" is taken as representative of the whole atoning work of Christ which, in a figure, it is. In the Book of Revelation we read: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (1:5b). "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood" (5:9b). "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14b).

## THE MEANING OF THE ATONEMENT

The most able minds of the church have pondered for generations upon the meaning of the atonement -- what was it that made Christ's death necessary? The Scriptures teach that Christ's death was a ransom but to whom? The ancient Greek fathers taught that Christ's death was a ransom to Satan. Satan had acquired a certain control over man and had brought him into bondage, and Christ was given by the Father as a ransom to Satan in order to buy the souls of men back to God. Gregory of Nyssa taught this theory in what was perhaps its crudest form, namely, that Christ was like the bait on a fishhook which Satan accepted, not being able to perceive the divinity of Christ hidden under the forms of his humiliation. Therefore Satan took hold of Christ, but he was not powerful enough to maintain Christ in his grasp. This theory has been regarded as impossible and absurd for perhaps a thousand years, but it has recently been revived in a modified form by Gustaf Aulen of the Theological School of Lund, Sweden. Aulen has professed to see in this old theory an approximation to the truth that man's state is self-contradictory, for although he has by a sad apostasy perverted himself into an abnormal condition under the devil's sway, he is nevertheless a creature of God who rightly belongs to God. Aulen thinks this old theory is an attempt to show that although the relationship between God and Satan is hostile, God would not use force in accomplishing his purpose. 33\_

The theory that the death of Christ was a ransom to Satan held the field from the days of Origen, who died A.D. 254, until a new interpretation was made by Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, who died A.D. 1109. Anselm taught that sin is debt (guilt) and that under the government of God it is absolutely necessary that this debt shall be paid, or that the penalty incurred by the guilt of sin shall be suffered either by the sinner or by a satisfactory substitute. This doctrine has become the orthodox interpretation of the universal church. The Council of Trent wrote: "Jesus Christ who, when we were enemies, merited justification for us by his most sacred passion on the tree and satisfied God the Father for us"; so holds the Roman Catholic Church and this view is re-echoed by the Lutheran Formula of Concord, the Heidelberg Catechism, the second Helvetic Confession, the Westminster Confession, and the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. There have been a number of minor theories unnecessary to specify here. The most prominent orthodox digression from the Anselmic interpretation is that called the governmental theory, propounded by Hugo Grotius, who died 1645. Grotius taught that the law is the product of the divine will and the right to relax its demands at will belongs to God's prerogative of moral governor, but since the free remission of the penalty in the case of some sinners would weaken the motives restraining from disobedience the subjects of the divine government in general by affording an example of impunity, the benevolence of God requires that as a precondition of the forgiveness of any sinners he should furnish such an example of suffering in Christ as would exhibit his determination that sin shall not escape with impunity. This is called the governmental theory because it emphasizes the fact that the sufferings of Christ were not an exact substitute for the sinner but were made a moral equivalent in the divine system of government. This theory was carried over into the Arminian theology and was taken up by the Wesleyan theologians with modifications, the purpose being to avoid the conclusion of the Calvinists that if Christ died for any man that man would be saved regardless of anything which he might do. Wesleyan theologians sought to get away from such a mechanical theory. This doctrine has been thinned out by liberals into something like the moral theory of atonement. On the other hand, it can be interpreted in an orthodox manner as by the great Dutch theologian, Philip Limborch, who wrote: "The death of Christ is called a sacrifice for sin, but sacrifices are not payment of debt, nor are they full satisfactions for sins. But a gratuitous remission is granted when they are offered."

We do not regard it necessary to arouse further controversy on the subject by proposing any ingenious interpretation of the atonement. It is enough to leave it where the New Testament placed it and say that in some way, possibly beyond human understanding in this life, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

#### CHRIST DIED FOR ALL MEN

Controversy over the doctrine of atonement has arisen from the difficulty of reconciling a universal atonement with the salvation of only a part of the human race. Those who believe in predestination have argued that if Christ suffered as a substitute for any soul, then that soul must be saved automatically and it is impossible that he should be lost. Nevertheless, according to the Christian teaching many souls are lost; therefore, say the orthodox Calvinists, it is obvious that Christ did not die for these souls else they would not, and could not, be lost. The reply which Arminian theologians make to this argument is that the death of Christ did not automatically insure the salvation of any given individuals, but it made salvation possible for every human being in all the history of the world because the benefit of Christ's atonement was retroactive from the day when he died on the cross, back through the long ages to the fall of Adam. This atonement had in fact been effective during all these years inasmuch as it had already been an accomplished fact in the purpose of God.

This doctrine -- that even though some are lost, all men may be saved through the atoning merits of Christ's death -- is taught so plainly in the Scriptures that the only way to avoid it is to deny the sincerity of these offers of salvation, which, of course, means to deny the truth of the Scriptures themselves. Following are some Scriptures which state in unequivocal language that the death of Christ was suffered in behalf of every human being that ever lived in this world: "That he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9b). "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (I John 2:2). "We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all" (II Cor. 5:14b-15a). "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17). "This is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" (4:42). "As by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Rom. 5:18). "Who gave himself a ransom for all" (I Tim. 2:6).

Those who believe in universalism, or a second probation, have twisted these texts in order to prove that all men will be saved, regardless of their behavior in this life. Paul's language as translated by James Moffatt is very sweeping: "As one man's trespass issued in doom for all, so one man's act of redress issued in acquittal and life for all. Just as one man's disobedience made all the rest sinners, so one man's obedience will make all the rest righteous." Orthodox believers have been "put to it" in order to reconcile these statements with a whole regiment of texts which teach the eternal damnation of the finally impenitent.

The explanation is so simple it is a matter of wonder that any could miss it. First of all, it is true that all men are conditionally saved in Christ as infants. This is the sense in which this scripture is perfectly fulfilled in harmony with the texts which teach the doctrine of eternal punishment. That all men are conditionally saved in Christ as infants is a specific teaching of the Lord Jesus himself, who said: "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:14). They are passive under the atonement, and all men are invited to return to this state of childhood innocency by the call of the Lord Jesus: "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3).

#### GOD INVITES ALL MEN TO ACCEPT SALVATION

Inasmuch as the conditions of salvation run so sharply against the sinful inclinations of mankind, nearly all gospel workers find it necessary to urge upon all men the necessity of seeking the Lord. Like Paul, they insist that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. It is certainly true, as Jesus himself has taught, that strait is the gate and narrow is the way that enters into life, and Christian teachers are justified in warning every man, and with tears as did Paul at Corinth. There is always, as is so often the case regarding other truths, a danger of putting the truth in a false light at this point by a misplaced emphasis. In other words, we must take great care to point out that the narrowness is in man's own sinful nature itself; it is not due to any lack of generosity in the divine call and provisions for man's salvation. In fact, the Scriptures teach that God is seeking man; that he is urging his salvation upon man; that he shines around man like the light of a summer sun and the only way anybody can be lost is to reject Christ, although in the blindness of sin that is, alas, far too easy to do. However much we may stress the urgency of the need of seeking God, we must never forget that in its deepest truth the fact is that God is seeking men, always and everywhere. The following texts serve to indicate that fact: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20). "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let

him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (22:17).

In this first text Christ presents himself as one who must be rejected in order to be avoided, and' in the second he is represented as extending a universal welcome to all men. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as. though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (II Cor. 5:19-20). Both by his Spirit and through his people Christ pleads with men to accept forgiveness and reconciliation. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (Isa. 45:22); "Ho, every one that trusteth, come ye to the waters" (55:1). "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest," says our Lord in Matthew 11:28. "Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come with me, and drink" (John 7:37). "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). And at the close of his earthly ministry our Lord said: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

These texts prove clearly that the atonement of Christ is for all men. He paid the debt for every man. They show further that this privilege is offered graciously, freely, and urgently to all men.

#### UNIVERSAL GRACE

The writer is a conservative Christian who sincerely confesses the solemn belief that multitudes of men will be eternally lost because they reject the mercy which is offered through Christ. This point is stressed in order to make clear the truth that the doom of the lost will not be because they could not find the way of salvation, but because they rejected it. Strictly speaking, it is not correct to say that God's grace is limited to only a few saintly souls; on the contrary, "the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:11-12).

Even the ancient heathen realized that God was moving in their lives. This is beautifully brought out by Lactantius who quotes Cicero, the ancient Roman philosopher, as follows: "There is indeed a true law, right reason, agreeing with nature, diffused among all unchanging, everlasting, which calls to duty by commanding, deters from wrong by forbidding; which, however, neither commands nor forbids the good in vain, nor affects the wicked by commanding or forbidding. It is not allowable to alter the provisions of this law, nor is it permitted us to modify it, nor can it be entirely abrogated. Nor, truly, can we be released from this law, either by the senate or by the people; nor is another person to be sought to explain or interpret it. Nor will there be one law at Rome and another at Athens; one law at the present time, and another hereafter: but the same law, everlasting and unchangeable, will bind all nations at all times; and there will be one common Master and Ruler of all, even God, the framer, arbitrator, and proposer of this law; and he who shall not obey this will flee from himself, and, despising the nature of man, will suffer the greatest punishments through this very thing, even though he shall have escaped the other punishments which are supposed to exist." [34]

Lactantius was a Roman Christian writer who died in A.D. 330. And that Cicero, who died 43 B.C., here made a correct surmise about the nature of God, the revelation of himself by his Spirit on the hearts of all men, is confirmed by the words of Paul: "When the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile

accusing or else excusing one another" (Rom. 2:14-15). It is the teaching of the old school of Christianity that a man cannot come to God for salvation merely in his own natural strength alone: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44); and the reason we cannot come to God by our own natural effort is because we are naturally weak and helpless.

Come, ye sinners poor and needy, Weak and wounded, sick and sore.

This is the teaching of Paul: "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Rom. 5:10). "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (5:6). Therefore our salvation must come as a gift by the grace of God, for there is nothing we can do to merit it: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). Paul speaks of the Word of God "which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (I Thess. 2:13d).

Augustine, who died in A.D. 430, wrote of the mysterious movement of this grace of God in the soul of man: Too late loved I Thee, O Thou Beauty of ancient days, yet ever new! too late I loved Thee! And behold, Thou wert within, and I abroad, and there I searched for Thee; deformed I, plunging amid those fair forms which Thou hadst made. Thou wert with me, but I was not with Thee. Things held me far from Thee, which, unless they were in Thee, were not at all. Thou calledst and shoutedst, and burstest my deafness. Thou flashedst, shonest, and scatteredst my blindness. Thou breathedst perfumes, and I draw in breath and pant for Thee. I tasted, and hunger and thirst Thou touchedst me, and I burned for Thy peace." [35]

But that our salvation is in the last instance dependent entirely upon the grace which God extends to us is taught by these scriptures: "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (II Thess. 2:13b). And to repeat the text already given in another connection, "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). This is offered to all humanity through the atonement, and in conformity with the general principles of Christian doctrine we must attribute this universal grace to the propitiatory work of the sacrifice of Christ. All that we have by way of grace and redemption comes to us as a favor through his atoning passion and death. Furthermore, this universal grace is given to all men and would work salvation in every human being that has ever lived if its offer were fully accepted. It would save every man, if he would yield to it. Men are lost because they reject this.

In the final analysis even the heathen are lost for this reason: "Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" (Rom. 1:28). "Esau . . . sold his birthright" (Heb. 12:16); that is, it was something which he had and cast away, and thus it is by the rejection of Christ that men are lost. This explains and justifies the remark which evangelists sometimes make, "The greatest of all sins is to reject Christ," and that is because such a rejection is the fundamental basis of all sin.

In the prologue to the Gospel of John Jesus Christ is introduced as the pre-existent Word that was with God and was God from the beginning. Then the writer asserts that this Word "was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9). The manner of this lighting is discovered in the fifth verse: "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." Goodspeed translates this: "The light is still shining in the darkness, for the darkness has never put it out."

Chrysostom, the greatest orator of the ancient church, who died in A.D. 407, made a beautiful comment on this passage: "If he enlightens every man coming into the world, how comes it that so many men remain without light? For all do not so much as acknowledge Christ. How then doth he enlighten every man? He illuminates indeed so far as in him is; but if any of their own accord, closing the eyes of their mind, will not direct their eyes unto the beams of this light, the cause that they remain in darkness is not from the nature of the light, but through their own malignity, who willingly have rendered themselves unworthy of so great a gift. But why believed they not? Because they would not: Christ did his part." [36]

Ambrose, a father of the Latin church, who died in A.D. 397, wrote: "The mystical Sun of Righteousness is arisen to all; he came to all; he suffered for all; and rose again for all: and therefore he suffered, that he might take away the sin of the world. But if any one believe not in Christ, he robs himself of this general benefit, even as if one by closing the windows should hold out the sunbeams. The sun is not therefore not arisen to all, because such a one hath so robbed himself of its heat: but the sun keeps its prerogative; it is such a one's imprudence that he shuts himself out from the common benefit of the light." [37]

Everybody knows that the Song of Solomon is a book commonly regarded as hard to understand. Modern negative criticism has seen in this book merely a human love lyric, but the devout thought of the church has throughout all ages understood this book to be a dramatic story of the wooing of the soul by its eternal Lover. It is not unreasonable to believe that the Song of Solomon is to be understood as expressing the love of Christ for his church in general and as wooing the human soul privileged to become a member of that church. We choose to follow the age-old voice of Christian tradition in accepting this interpretation, for to do so is to honor the Scriptures while to count this book a mere story of human love is to degrade its message. Viewed in this light, then, let us see how this great spiritual poem portrays the wooing of the soul by Christ who comes seeking it.

The soul is speaking:

"I slept, but my heart lay waking;

I dreamed -- Ah! there is my darling knocking!

Then Christ speaks:

"Open to me, my own," he calls, "my dear, my dove, my paragon! My head is drenched with dew, my hair with drops of the night."

This seems a good description of Christ's passion in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Then the soul makes its excuses:

"But I have doffed my robe;

why should I don it?

My feet are bathed;

why should I soil them?"

Then my darling put his hand in,

his right hand at the door,  
and my heart yearned for him;  
how my soul fainted when I heard him!  
So I rose to let my darling in,  
my hands all moist with myrrh,  
my finger wet with liquid myrrh,  
that dripped on the catch of the bolt.  
I opened to my darling,  
but, my darling, he had gone;  
I sought him, but I could not find him,  
I called, he never answered.

-- Song of Sol. 5:2-6, Moffatt

This should not be taken to mean that people who really desire to be saved cannot any more be saved, for the very fact that they wish to be saved is proof that the Spirit of God is calling them. On the contrary, this is merely a poetical way of saying that when people tarry too long the Lord leaves them and they will be plunged into grief and despair although they will not have any true heart-hunger for God.

Augustine has described the way in which the soul's eternal Lover woos it from sin to grace with these words: "What is that which shines through me, and strikes my heart without injury, and I both shudder and burn? I shudder inasmuch as I am unlike it; and I burn inasmuch as I am like it. It is Wisdom itself that shines through me, clearing my cloudiness, which again overwhelms me, fainting from it, in the darkness and amount of my punishment. For my strength is brought down in need, so that I cannot endure my blessings, until Thou, O Lord, who hast been gracious to all mine iniquities, heal also all mine infirmities Let him that is able hear Thee discoursing within." [38]

## THE MEANING OF REPENTANCE

By turning our minds back to the central theme of man's ideal relation to God we are reminded that love is the key to the Christian doctrine of salvation. God does love all men with a love like that of a mother. The Lord says: "Can a woman forget her infant, forget to pity her babe? Yet even were a mother to forget, never will I forget you" (Isa. 49:15, Moffatt). "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you" (66:13). "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. 31:3). I am aware that these verses were spoken directly to ancient Israel, but I believe they have a much wider meaning as referring to the ideal bond of love which it is the passionate purpose of God to restore in all mankind as far as is possible and consistent with the freedom of the human will. It is the breaking of this tie of love between man and God that occasions all the sin and misery of mankind; It is not quite accurate to say that this tie is broken by sin, for it is the breaking of it which constitutes the very meaning of Sin. If this be true, it is easy to see the path by which man must return to God. The whole world of man's life is

filled with the gentle light of that eternal sun. Everywhere a man may look he will find the light contending against the darkness of this. sinful world.

We have tried to show that God is offering salvation to man all the time and everywhere, and actually in infancy he conditionally gave salvation to man, and as a consequence men are lost by rejecting Christ. There is no danger of making salvation too easy by presenting it in this its true scriptural light, because once a man's eyes have become opened by faith to see the realities of the eternal world he will be stricken with a consciousness of his misery and sin which will impel him to seek the Lord in deep sorrow of heart. We must bear in mind at the outset, however, that men everywhere are rejecting Christ; they are shutting their eyes against the light; they are barring the doors against the gracious Guest. Jesus explained that this is done through the cares of the world. The seed of God is sown in the heart of man, but "he also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful." Or, as it is explained in another place, the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things entering in choke the word and it becometh unfruitful. Thus we see how things which are commonly regarded as innocent, harmless things the constant hum of the industry, enjoyment, pleasure, anxiety, and toil of everyday life, are allowed to engross all the attention, to fill all the mental sky of a person's life. Or, to change the figure, these things are allowed, like weeds and thorns, to grow up to such a point that the seed of the Word of God cannot grow good thoughts, good desires, a beginning conviction of sin, a yearning for God. All these are planted in the heart by the Holy Spirit, and choked out because the hearer of the Word does not give his own soul, and the claims of God and of eternity, even a fair chance to grow in his heart. That is one reason why God blesses sermons and songs. They are like small hoes which for a brief moment push aside the weeds and let the eternal sun shine upon the seed of the Word of God in the heart. But even when these are lacking that seed will yet grow if only it has an opportunity.

An illustration of this is seen in the case of men cast adrift on the sea. When they float for days away from newspapers, telephones, the day's business, and all the jokes and fun, frolic and diversions of earthly life, and there in the solemn silence and stillness face eternity one day after another, it often happens in this vacant place of the heart that the eternal seed of God springs up to bless their lives.

Most gospel preachers spend a great deal of time explaining the various steps of repentance, its degrees and its stages and its relation to faith. But when one remembers that man is lost because he has strayed from God's love he sees that the very first step back to that love, and therefore to a state of salvation, is faith. Repentance is simply one aspect of faith, for faith does not move very far until it makes repentance inevitable or dies in its failure to do so. The very moment a man begins to believe in God as his loving Father, at that moment he begins to see his own sinfulness and appalling need. That is the beginning of repentance.

At the beginning this faith is a gift from God, yet a gift which the sinner has the power to reject. If exercised, faith will lead him through all the experience of repentance and acceptance to the full knowledge of the grace of God and the full joy of eternal life. This is proved by the fact that repentance is definitely said to be a gift from God. When Peter described to the church in Jerusalem his experience in preaching to the household of Cornelius, "they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles GRANTED Repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). On another occasion Peter preached in Jerusalem concerning Jesus being exalted to "a Prince and a Savior, for TO GIVE REPENTANCE to Israel" (5:31). This is one of those good gifts which come down from above (Jas. 1:17).

Let us illustrate the relation of faith to repentance by a little story: In early pioneer days a certain innkeeper enriched himself by robbing his guests. To do this successfully he often thought it necessary to murder the guests. When his son grew up he wished to see the world and so departed from the old home place and traveled over the country for several years. Deciding to return home and wishing to surprise his parents, he allowed his beard to grow and otherwise disguised himself, expecting at the proper time to reveal himself to the joy of his parents. Since he was riding a fine horse, his father quickly formed a purpose to kill him, not knowing, of course, who he was. As this unknown son bent his bearded face down to the dark waters of a near-by spring his father stealthily leaned over him and stabbed a long knife into his heart from the back. The broken body of the helpless stranger was buried in a secret and unhonored grave for several days before associates of the father, talking over their foul business, unintentionally apprised him of the fact that the bearded young man was his own son. Then, of course, the sorrow of the father was great, but there was no consolation.

This true story seems to have all the elements of a parable: the father loved a certain idea of his son, held in memory and formal respect. It is evident, however, that he did not love the son in his own person because he killed his son. So there are millions today who love God and Christ merely as figments of the imagination; they love a form, an idea, a theory of God. Kierkegaard calls this imaginative idea of God simply a small "g" god. He says that a man must get rid of the small "g" god in order to truly love God.

But suppose we admit that the father really loved the son and did not recognize him. Suppose he had injured the son badly but not fatally, and that at that moment he had begun to believe that it was his own son. Can we not see what a great change this belief would bring over the man? Would he not at once begin to weep and be sorry for having injured his beloved son? Would he not ask his son's forgiveness piteously and helplessly, and would he not likewise do everything within his power to make the wrong right and repair the injury he had done to his son? We can imagine the father tenderly carrying the boy to his home and humbling himself in every conceivable way in order to undo the wrong. This is the meaning of repentance. Theological writers have put it into technical form until the real heart emotion of the experience has been obscured by the mechanics of the idea. The soul has injured and offended God. Strange to say, it has done this both knowingly and unknowingly, just as this robber knew he was doing wrong when he stabbed the young man, but he did not know how extremely evil that act was. Every sinner in the world today knows more or less clearly that he is doing wrong, but no one living in willful sin has any true conception of the tragic enormity of his rebellion against God. Just as the belief on the part of the father that the wounded corpse was that of his own son produced sorrow and anguish in his own mind, likewise the belief on the part of any sinner that he has sinned against God will tend to produce sorrow, compunction, and all the elements of true repentance; That is, if the person who has begun to see all life in this world, and God and eternity, by the eye of faith will continue to look with this eye of faith he will see his sins so enormous that he will have no rest until he has received the assurance of forgiveness and salvation. The only other way he can deal with this situation -- prevent this repentance from growing into a complete forsaking of sin and acceptance of salvation -- is to shut his eye of faith and turn his heart again unto unbelief, thus rejecting Christ and salvation at the moment he rejects sorrow for his sins.

Unbelief is such a terrible sin because it makes all other sins possible. Thus we read: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Heb. 3:12). Unbelief blinds the eyes to the vision of God and dims the reality of those spiritual things which make repentance and salvation real, objective experiences of life rather than figments of the imagination, for "he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"

(11:6).

Repentance, then, is the human response to the conviction wrought by the Holy Spirit in the heart of the sinner. "When he comes, he will convict the world, convincing men of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in me" (John 16:8-9, Moffatt). When by faith the sinner sees the wounds he has made in the body of his Beloved, if he continues his gaze of faith the result must be (1) contrition: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17). Such an one has the humble and meek attitude described by Christ: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:34). (2) This contrition naturally induces a sense of sorrow towards God. The Authorized Version calls it a "godly sorrow," but in the original it is a "sorrow toward God." Moffatt translates it "the pain God is allowed to guide ends in a saving repentance never to be regretted, whereas the world's pain ends in death. See what this pain divine has done for you, how serious it has made you, how keen to clear yourselves, how indignant, how alarmed" (II Cor. 7:10-11). Here is made very clear the distinction between genuine repentance and mere remorse of conscience -- sorrow because the offender has been caught and must suffer the penalty. Sorrow towards God is a sorrow that sees sin as an offense against God and is genuinely sorry that it ever happened. This, of course, implies a sincere purpose of amendment of life: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). To the lame man who was healed Christ said: "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee" (John 5:14). "If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him" (Ezek. 33:15-16).

These few texts indicate the entire tenor of Scripture: repentance has no meaning until it has developed into a sincere, resolute purpose to amend the life by the grace of God. This fact alone will show us the shallowness of much modern religion. It is a popular belief that repentance means being sorry with the understanding that, of course, sin is inevitable and one is sure to drift back into it again. According to Scripture, this is not true repentance. There is never any true repentance until there is a sincere resolution to give up sin by the grace of God. And this is a valid test of the reality of repentance.

Sometimes penitents do not know whether their sorrow has been deep enough, whether they have shed enough tears, whether they have lingered in the shadows of godly sorrow long enough. To these the answer is that there is a spiritual instrument which gauges this process with finest accuracy. Any person who is sorry enough to quit sin in general, including the particular sin which troubles him, that person is truly penitent and need have no fear regarding the depth of his sorrow for sin.

While we have no sympathy with a purely mechanical, mathematical conception of repentance, nevertheless it is wise to form a clear picture of what is involved in repentance. One of the most important of these elements is forgiving our enemies and becoming reconciled to all mankind. This is an implication of the very nature of the love commandment which requires first, love to God, and then love to man. The Apostle says: "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (I John 4:20). The same writer says also: "He that hateth his brother is in darkness" (2:11). Jesus laid reconciliation with our fellow man at the very beginning of the life of faith. Referring to the old Jewish law regarding sacrificing for the forgiveness of sin, he taught that when one brings his gift to the altar to pray for forgiveness "and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. 5:23-24). Since the Jewish altar has long since passed away, it is not necessary to take this literally, and it

does not necessarily mean that a man should postpone seeking salvation until he has traversed the earth and come into physical contact with his enemy for the purpose of reconciliation. The spirit of this verse is carried out when a man at the altar seeking salvation forms a resolute purpose in his heart that he will, so far as lies within him, become reconciled to his enemy regardless of whose fault may have caused that enmity.

Christ taught reconciliation in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," or in the other form of the prayer: "As we forgive those who trespass against us." In other words, that prayer is literally a prayer for condemnation unless we are willing to forgive our enemies. Christ repeated this lesson in the story of a debtor who owed \$10,000,000 (Goodspeed), but who after he was released violently assailed a fellow servant who owed him only \$20 (Matt. 18:23-35) . If God is willing to forgive us so much, we must be willing to forgive the lesser offenses of our fellow men. "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:15). This is the acid test of repentance. The man who is truly brokenhearted over his sins will make every possible effort to make his wrongs right. He will restore what he has stolen and robbed; he will admit generously wherein he has acted against love in his relations with his fellow men.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (I John 1:9). Perhaps the first step in this confession is confession to one's self. This is a step which is practically impossible to the natural man. It can only be done by yielding to the entreaty of the Spirit of God. It is as natural for men to justify all of their actions and all of their wrong behavior as it is to do these sinful things in the first place. It is the preliminary work of the Spirit of God in convicting of sin to enable the sinner to acknowledge to himself that he has done wrong. Then he can and will confess it to God, and under certain circumstances to his fellow men, particularly wherein he has injured any person directly. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13).

33 Cf. Walter Marshall Horton, *Contemporary Continental Theology*, p. 159

34 Lactantius, *The Divine Institute*, chap. 8

35 *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, Book X

36 Chrysostom, *Commentary on John*, Homily VIII

37 Ambrose, *On Psalm 118*, "Sermon 8"

38 *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, Book XI

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