

Of Repentance Towards God.

by John Gill

Repentance towards God is a change of mind and conduct that involves turning away from sin and returning to God, and is characterized by a true sight and sense of sin, hearty and unfeigned sorrow, shame and confusion of face, loathing, detestation, and abhorrence of sin, ingenuous acknowledgment of sin, and a resolution to forsake sin.

Scripture: Psalm 51:3, Isaiah 55:7, Ezekiel 18:30-32, Matthew 21:32, Mark 16:16, Luke 24:47, Acts 20:21, Romans 2:4, 2 Corinthians 7:10, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Grace Of God", "Repentance"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the significance of repentance towards God as a vital aspect of internal worship and godliness. He explains that true repentance involves a heartfelt turning away from sin and a sincere return to God, motivated by His grace and mercy. Gill distinguishes between various types of repentance, including natural, national, external, hypocritical, legal, and evangelical repentance, highlighting that genuine repentance is a gift from God that leads to a transformation of the heart and life. He stresses that repentance is not merely an outward act but a deep, inward sorrow for sin that results in a commitment to forsake it and seek God's forgiveness. Ultimately, Gill concludes that true repentance is essential for salvation and is accompanied by the assurance of God's pardon and grace.

Transcript

A Body of PRACTICAL Divinity

Book 1--Chapter 4

OF REPENTANCE TOWARDS GOD

Repentance is another part of internal worship; it is a branch of godliness which lies in the disposition of the soul Godwards; for in the exercise of this the sensible sinner has much to do with God; he has a special respect to him against whom he has sinned, and therefore it is with great propriety called "Repentance towards God" (Acts 20:21). Concerning which may be observed, 1. Its name, and the words and phrases by which it is expressed, both in the Old and in the New Testament, and by Jews, Greeks, and Latins, which may give some light into the thing itself. 1a.

First, the Jews commonly express it by hbwvt a "turning", or "returning", and it is frequently signified in the Old Testament by a man's turning from his evil ways, and returning to the Lord; the term from which he

turns is sin, the term to which he turns is the Lord, against whom he has sinned; and what most powerfully moves, encourages, and induces him to turn, is the pardoning grace and mercy of God through Christ (Isa. 55:7), and so in the New Testament, repentance and turning are mentioned together, and the latter as explanative of the former; (see Acts 3:19; 26:20).

There is another word in Hebrew used for repentance, *Mxn* (Hosea 11:8; 13:14), which also signifies comfort; because such who sincerely repent of sin, and are truly humbled for it, should be comforted, lest, as the apostle says, they should be "swallowed up with overmuch sorrow" (2 Cor. 2:7), and it is God's usual way to bring his people "into the wilderness", into a distressed state, to lead them into a sense of sin, and humiliation for it, and then to speak comfortably to them (Hosea 2:14), and the Spirit of God is first a reprover for sin, and a convincer of it, and then a comforter; he first shows men the evil nature of sin, and the just desert of it, and gives them the grace of repentance for it, and then comforts them with the application of pardon through the blood of Jesus (John 16:7,8,14), and blessed are they that mourn for sin in an evangelical manner, for they shall be comforted (Matthew 5:4). 1b.

Secondly, the Greek word more frequently used in the New Testament for repentance is *metanoia*, which signifies an "after understanding", or "after knowledge"; as when a man takes into serious consideration a fact after it is committed, and thinks otherwise of it, and wishes he had not done it, is sorry for it, and resolves, through the grace of God, to forsake such practices; this is a proof of a man's wisdom and understanding; now he begins to be wise, and to show himself an understanding man; even an heathen^[1] could say, "Repentance is the beginning of wisdom, and an avoiding of foolish works and words, and the first preparation to a life not to be repented of."

It is a change of the mind for the better, and which produces change of action and conduct: this, as it is expressive of true repentance, flows from the understanding being enlightened by the Spirit of God, when the sinner beholds sin in another light it did, even as exceeding sinful; and loathes it, and abhors it and himself for it. There is another word the Greeks use for repentance, *metameleia*, and though the noun is not used in the New Testament, the verb is (Matthew 21:29,32), and signifies a care and anxiety of mind after a fact is committed, a concern with sorrow that it should be done, and a care for the future not to do it again; hence the apostle, among the genuine fruits of godly sorrow for sin, mentions this in the first place, "What carefulness it wrought in you", not to offend more (2 Cor. 7:11).

It also signifies a change of mind and conduct, as appears from (Matthew 21:29), a penitent sinner has another notion of sin than he had; before it was a sweet morsel, now a bitter and evil thing; before his heart was bent upon it, now determined through divine grace to forsake it, and cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart. 1c. Thirdly, The Latins generally express repentance by "*poenitentia*", from "*poena*" punishment; hence our English word "penitence", and the popish "penance", which is a sort of corporal punishment for sin inflicted on the body by fastings, scourgings, pilgrimages, &c. but true penitence lies not in these things, but is rather an inward punishment of the mind, when a man is so displeased with himself for what he has done, and so severely reflects upon himself for it, that he takes as it were a kind of vengeance on himself within himself, which are the lashes of conscience;^[2] so the apostle observes of godly sorrow, "What indignation, yea what revenge" it wrought in you, as in the above quoted place; and this inward revenge is sometimes expressed by outward gestures, as by smiting upon the thigh, and upon the breast (Jer. 31:19; Luke 18:13).

There is another word which the Latins use for repentance, "*resipiscentia*", which signifies a man's being wise again, a coming to his wits, to his senses again.^[3] Lactantius^[4] explains it of the recovery of a man's

mind from a state of insanity; a man, while he is in an unconverted and impenitent state, is not himself, he is not in his right mind; not only his foolish heart is darkened, and he is without understanding, and to do good has no knowledge, but "madness" is "in his heart while he lives" in such a state; every act of sin is not only folly but madness, as all acts of hostility committed against God, which sins are, must needs be; "the man that dwelt among the tombs" (Mark 5:1-20), is a fit emblem of such persons: now when an impenitent sinner becomes penitent, he may be said to "come to himself", as the prodigal did (Luke 15:17), so the apostle Paul before conversion was exceeding mad against the saints, and thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus; but when he was converted he was recovered from his insanity, and appeared sober and in his right mind, and said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" when a sinner is truly convinced of sin, and thoroughly humbled for it, and has repentance unto life given him, and a comfortable application of the blood and righteousness of Christ unto him for his pardon and justification, and his mind is become sedate, serene and quiet, the man who before was mad, is an emblem of him, when he was seen "sitting clothed and in his right mind" (Mark 5:15). 1d.

Fourthly, the word "contrition", or brokenness of mind, is sometimes used for repentance, and there is some foundation for it in the word of God; we often read of a contrite heart and spirit; David says he was "feeble and sore broken" (Ps. 38:8), which seems to be under a sense of sin: a man's heart is naturally hard, as hard as the nether millstone, and therefore called a "stony heart", and such an one is an impenitent one; hence hardness, and an impenitent heart, are put together, as designing the same thing (Rom. 2:5).

The word of God is made use of to break it in pieces, "is not my word--like a hammer to break the rock in pieces?" that is, to make the heart contrite, which is like to a rock, and whereby it becomes soft and tender, as Josiah's was, like an heart of flesh, susceptible of serious impressions, and of a true sense of things; and though this contrition of heart seems to be a work of the law, by which is the knowledge of sin, and which works wrath in the conscience on account of it, smites and cuts and wounds it; yet hereby it is prepared to receive the benefit of the gospel, by which the Lord "heals the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds" (Ps. 147:3; Isa. 61:1).

However, great notice is taken of men of contrite hearts and spirits; the sacrifices of such hearts are acceptable to God; he looks unto, is nigh unto, and dwells with those who are of such a spirit and saves them (Ps. 51:17; 34:18; Isa. 57:15; 66:2), besides the heart may be broken, made soft and melted down as much or more under a sense of pardoning grace displayed in the gospel, than under a sense of wrath through the threatenings and terrors of the law. 1e. Fifthly, repentance is expressed by sorrow for sin.

"My sorrow is continually before me", says David, "I will be sorry for my sin" (Ps. 38:17,18), and which is signified not by outward gestures, not by rending garments, but by rending the heart (Joel 2:13), it is a felt pain and inward sorrow of the heart for sin, and what the apostle calls a sorrow "after a godly sort", kata qeon, "after God", which is according to the mind and will of God; and because of sin committed against God, a God of love, grace, and mercy, and which springs from love to God and hatred of sin, and is attended with faith in God, as a God pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin, for Christ's sake; but of this more hereafter. 2.

The nature and kinds of repentance. Not to take notice of the penance of the Papists, which lies in punishing their bodies, as before observed; and in men making themselves, or in others making them, public examples in such a way; which though it may be called repentance before men, it is not repentance towards God, nor does it answer the end vainly intended by it, making satisfaction for sin; nor is an

external reformation of life and manners repentance in the sight of God.

Men may be outwardly reformed, as the Pharisees were, and yet not repent of their sins, as they did not (Matthew 21:32; 23:28), and after such an external reformation men may return to their former sinful course of life, and their last end be worse than the beginning; besides there may be true repentance for sin where there is no time and opportunity for reformation, or showing forth a reformation of life and manners, as in the thief upon the cross and others, who are brought to repentance on their death beds; and reformation of life and manners, when it is best and most genuine, is the fruit and effect of repentance, and a bringing forth fruits meet for it, as evidences of it, and so distinct from that itself. 2a.

First, there is a natural repentance, or what is directed to by the light of nature, and the dictates of a natural conscience; for as there was in the heathens, and so is in every natural man, a knowledge of good and evil, of the difference in some respects between moral good and evil, and a conscience which, when it does its office, approves of what is well done, and accuses for that which is ill; so when conscience charges a man with doing an ill thing, and he is convinced of it, the light of nature and conscience direct him to wish he had not done it, and to repent of it, and to endeavour for the future to avoid it; as may be seen in the case of the Ninevites, who being threatened with the destruction of their city for their sins, proclaimed a fast, and issued out an order that everyone should turn from his evil ways, in hope that the wrath of God would be averted from them, though they could not be fully assured of it.

The Gentiles laid great stress upon their repentance to conciliate the favour of God unto them; for they thought this made complete satisfaction for their sins, and wiped them clean, so that they imagined they were almost if not altogether pure and innocent:[5] there is a repentance which the goodness of God in providence might or should lead men unto, which yet it does not, but after their hardness and impenitent heart treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, and righteous judgment of God (Rom. 2:4,5). 2b.

Secondly, There is a national repentance, such as the Jews in Babylon were called unto, to which temporal blessings were promised, and a deliverance from temporal calamities; as on the one hand, a living in their own land, and a comfortable enjoyment of good things in it; and on the other hand, captivity, and all the distresses of it threatened; "Repent, and turn yourselves from your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin" (Ezek. 18:30-32), and which has no connection with the special grace of God, and with spiritual and everlasting things.

The same people were called to repent of their Pharisaism, of their disbelief of the Messiah, and other evil works; and were told that the men of Nineveh would rise up in judgment and condemn them, who repented at the preaching of Jonah, and yet a greater than Jonah, even Christ himself, called them to repentance (Matthew 12:41). The same people were called upon by the apostles of Christ to repent of their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, and to turn unto him, and to save themselves from temporal ruin, which for their impenitence and unbelief came upon their nation, city, and temple (Acts 3:19). 2c.

Thirdly, there is an external repentance, or an outward humiliation for sin, such as was in Ahab, which, though nothing more, it was taken notice of by the Lord, "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me?" and though it lay only in rending his clothes, and putting on sackcloth, and in fasting, and in a mournful way, yet the Lord was pleased to promise that the evil threatened should not come in his days (1 Kings 21:29). And such is the repentance Tyre and Sidon would have exercised, had they had the advantages and privileges that some cities had, where Christ taught his doctrines, and wrought miracles; and of this kind was the repentance of the Ninevites which was regarded of God (Matthew 11:21; 12:41).

2d.

Fourthly, there is an hypocritical repentance, such as was in the people of Israel in the wilderness, who when the wrath of God broke out against them for their sins, "returned" unto him, or repented, but "their heart was not right with him" (Ps 78:34-37), so it is said of Judah, she "hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the Lord"; and of Ephraim, or the ten tribes, "they return, but not to the Most High, they are like a deceitful bow" (Hosea 7:16), who turned aside and dealt unfaithfully. 2e.

Fifthly, there is a legal and there is an evangelical repentance. 2e1. There is a legal one, which is a mere work of the law, and the effect of convictions of sin by it, which in time wear off and come to nothing; for, 2e1a. There may be a sense of sin and an acknowledgment of it, and yet no true repentance for it, as in the cases of Pharaoh and of Judas, who both said, "I have sinned" (Ex. 9:27; Matthew 27:4), yet they had no true sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, nor godly sorrow for it. 2e1b.

There may be a kind of sorrow for it, not for the evil of fault that is in sin, but on account of the evil of punishment for it, as appears in some cases, and in Cain's (Gen. 4:13). 2e1c. There may be a great deal of terror of mind because of sin, a great outcry about it, a fearful looking for of judgment for it, abundance of tears shed on the account of it, as were by Esau for the blessing, without success; the devils believe and tremble, but do not repent;[6] there are weeping and wailing in hell, but no repentance. 2e1d.

Such a repentance, if no more than a mere legal one, issues in despair, as in Cain, whose words may be rendered, "My sin is greater than that it may be forgiven"; it is a repentance that may be repented of and is not unto life, but ends in death, as it did in Judas; it is "the sorrow of the world which worketh death" (2 Cor. 7:10). 2e2. There is an evangelical repentance, which lies, 2e2a. In a true sight and sense of sits; in a sight of it, as in itself considered as exceeding sinful in its own nature, and not merely as in its effects and consequences ruinous and destructive; not only in a sight of it in the glass of the divine law, but as that is held in the hand, and seen in the light of the blessed Spirit; and in a sight of it as contrary to the pure and holy nature of God, as well as repugnant to his will, and a breach of his law; and in a view of it as it appears in the glass of pardoning love and grace. 2e2b.

In a hearty and unfeigned sorrow for it; this sorrow for it is the rather because it is against God, and that not only as a holy and righteous Being, but as good, and gracious, and merciful, of whose goodness, both in providence and grace, the sinner is sensible; the consideration of which increases his sorrow, and makes it the more intense and hearty. 2e2c. It is attended with shame and confusion of face, as in Ezra 9:6,8,10 and Luke 18:13 this shame increases the more, the more a sinner is sensible that God is "pacified towards him for all that he has done" (Ezek. 16:63). 2e2d.

Such a repentance is accompanied with a loathing, detestation, and abhorrence of sin as the worst of evils; to truly penitent sinners sin appears most odious and loathsome; nay they not only loath their sins but themselves for them, and the rather when most sensible of the goodness of God in bestowing both temporal and spiritual blessings on them, and especially the latter (Ezek. 20:40-44; 36:25-31), yea they abhor it as of all things the most detestable, when they are in the exercise of this grace; so it was with holy Job, when favored with a special sight of the greatness and goodness of God (Job 42:6; Isa. 6:5). 2e2e.

Where this repentance is there is an ingenuous acknowledgment of sin, as may be seen in David (Ps. 32:5 51:3 in Dan. 9:4,5), and in the apostle Paul (1 Tim. 1:13-15), so the prodigal, as soon as he came to himself, and was made sensible of his sin, and repented of it, went to his father, and said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight" (Luke 15:21), and to encourage such a sincere repentance

and ingenuous confession, the apostle John says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). 2e2f.

It is followed with a resolution, through the grace of God, to forsake sin; this the sinner is encouraged unto, as before observed, by the abundance of pardon through the mercy of God in Christ (Isa. 55:7), and indeed it is only such who can expect to share in it; "Whoso confesseth (sins) and forsaketh them, shall have merry" (Prov. 28:13). Now such a repentance appears to be evangelical; inasmuch, as 2e2f1. It is from the Spirit of God, who reproveth for sin and convinces of it, enlightens the eyes of the understanding to see the exceeding sinfulness of sin; and as a Spirit of grace and supplication works this grace in the heart, and draws it forth into exercise, to mourn over sin in a gospel manner at the throne of grace (Zech. 12:10). 2e2f2.

Such repentance, in the exercise of it, follows upon real conversion and divine instruction, "Surely after that I was turned I repented, and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh" (Jer. 31:19) upon such a turn as is made by powerful and efficacious grace, and upon such instruction as leads into the true nature of sin, the effect of which is blushing shame and confusion. 2e2f3. Is what is encouraged and influenced by gospel promises, such as these in (Isa. 55:7; Jer. 3:12,13), now when repentance proceeds not upon the terrors of the law, but upon such gracious promises as these, it may be called evangelical. 2e2f4.

It is that which is attended with faith and hope: repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, go together as doctrines, and so they do as graces; which is first in exercise is not easy to say; our Lord says of the Pharisees, that they "repented not, that they might believe", which looks as if repentance was before and in order to believing (Matthew 21:32), and elsewhere faith is represented as first looking to Christ, and then repentance or mourning for sin; repentance, as some have expressed it, is a tear that drops from faith's eye (Zech. 12:10).

However, that is truly evangelical repentance which has with it faith in the blood of Christ for the remission of sins; for repentance and remission of sins, as they go together as doctrines, so also as blessings of grace (Luke 24:47; Acts 5:31), for where true repentance for sin is, there must be faith in Christ for the remission of it, at least hope of pardon by his blood, or else such repentance would issue in despair, and appear to be no other than the sorrow of the world which worketh death. 2e2f5.

It is such a repentance which flows not from dread of punishment, and from fear of the wrath of God, but from love to God, and of righteousness and holiness, and from an hatred of sin; they that love the Lord hate evil, and they love righteousness and hate evil because he does; and when tempted to sin reason after this manner, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God", so holy just, and good, and who has shown such love and kindness to me? (Gen. 39:9), it was love to Christ, flowing from a sense of pardoning grace and mercy, that fetched such a flood of tears from the eyes of the penitent woman at Christ's feet, with which she washed them, and wiped them with the hairs of her head; and which caused Peter, under a sense of sin, to go out and weep bitterly (Luke 7:37,38,47; 22:61,62). 3.

The object and subjects of repentance; the object is sin, the subjects are sinners. 3a. First, the object of repentance is sin, hence called "repentance from dead works", which sins be; and from which the blood of Christ purges the conscience of a penitent sinner, and speaks peace and pardon to it (Heb. 6:2; 9:14). And, 3a1. First, not only grosser sins, but sins of a lesser size, are to be repented of; there is a difference in sins, some are greater others lesser (John 19:11), both are to be repented of; sins against the first and

second tables of the law, sins more immediately against God, and sins against men; and some against men are more heinous and enormous than others, as well as those against God; as not only worshipping of devils, and idols of gold and silver, &c. but murders, sorceries, fornications, and thefts, which ought to be repented of, but by some were not, though they had deliverances from plagues, which was an aggravation of their impenitence (Rev. 9:20,21), and not only those, but also sins of a lesser kind are to be repented of; and even sinful thoughts, for the thought of foolishness is sin, and to be repented of; for the unrighteous man is to repent of and forsake his thoughts, as well as the wicked man his ways, and turn to the Lord; and not only unclean, proud, malicious, envious, and revengeful thoughts are to be repented of, but even thoughts of seeking for justification before God by a man's own righteousness, which may be intended in the text referred to (Isa. 55:7). 3a2.

Secondly, not only public but private sins are to be repented of. There are some sins which are committed in a very public manner, in the face of the sun, and are known to all; and there are others that are more secret; and a truly sensible sinner, as he desires to be "cleansed from secret faults", or to have those forgiven him, so he heartily repents of them, even of sins known to none but God and his own soul; and this is a proof of the genuineness of his repentance. 3a3. Thirdly, there are sins both of omission and commission, which are to be repented of; when a man omits those duties of religion which ought to be done, or commits those sins which ought to be avoided by him; or omits the weightier matters of religion, and only attends to lesser ones, when he ought to have done the one, and not to have left the other undone; and as God forgives both (Isa. 43:22-25), so both sorts of sins are to be repented of; and a sense of pardoning grace will engage the sensible sinner to it. 3a4.

Fourthly, there are sins which are committed in the most solemn, serious, religious, and holy performances of God's people, which are to be repented of; for there is not a just man that does good and sinneth not in that good he does; there is not only an imperfection, but an impurity in the best righteousness of the saints of their own working out, and therefore called filthy rags; and as there was provision made under the law for the bearing and removing the sins of holy things, as by Aaron the high priest, so there is a provision made for the atonement of these as well as all other sins, by Christ our high priest; and therefore these are to be confessed and mourned over the head of him our antitypical scape goat. 3a5.

Fifthly, the daily sins of life are to be repented of; no man lives without sin, it is daily committed by the best of men, in many things we all offend, and even in all things; and as we have need to pray, and are directed to pray daily for the forgiveness of sin, so we are to repent of it daily; repentance is not only to be exercised upon the first conviction and conversion of a sinner, nor only on account of some grievous sin, or great backsliding he may after fall into, but it is continually to be exercised by believers, since they are continually sinning against God in thought, word, and deed. 3a6.

Sixthly, not only actual sins and transgressions in thought, word, and deed, are to be repented of, but original and indwelling sin. Thus David when he fell into some grievous sins, and was brought to a true sense of them, and a sincere repentance for them, he not only made a confession of them in the penitential psalm he wrote on that occasion, but he was led to take notice of, and acknowledge and mourn over the original corruption of his nature, from whence all his sinful actions flowed, saying, "Behold I was shapen in iniquity" (Ps. 51:5).

So the apostle Paul, though he lived a life unstained, and in all good conscience, free from any public, external, notorious sin, yet owned and lamented the sin that dwelt in him, and the force, power, and

prevalence of it, as that it hindered him from doing the good he would, and put him on doing the evil he would not (Rom. 7:18-24). Now when a sensible sinner confesses, laments, and mourns over the original corruption of his nature, and the sin that dwells in him, it is a clear case his repentance is genuine and sincere, since it is what he himself is only sensible of.

Now all this is with respect to God; the sinner repents of sin with regard to God, and as it concerns him, and therefore is called "repentance towards God", and a sorrow for it "after a godly sort" (Acts 20:21; 2 Cor. 7:11), and he repents of sin because sin is committed against him. 3a6a. All sin is against God in a sense, as it is against his will, yet there is distinction between sins against God and against men (1 Sam. 2:25), now sin committed against God, and considered as such, is a cutting consideration to a sensible sinner, sensible of the greatness and goodness of God, and causes his sorrow and repentance for sin to rise higher, as it was to David, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (Ps. 51:4). 3a6b.

Because sin is a breach of the law of God (1 John 3:4), of that law, which is itself, holy, just, and good; of that law of which God is the giver, and who is that lawgiver that is able to save and to destroy, and on whose legislative power and authority a contempt is cast by sin, and which therefore gives pain and distress of mind to the penitent sinner. 3a6c. Because sin is contrary to the nature of God, as well as to his law; he is of purer eyes than to behold it with approbation; he is not a God that takes pleasure in it, but is displeased with it; it is the abominable thing his righteous soul hates, and therefore they that love the Lord must hate it, and it cannot but give them a concern, and cause sorrow when they commit it. 3a6d.

And the rather as by sinning a slight is cast on his goodness, grace, and love, and which occasions severe reflections on themselves, and much shame and blushing that they should sin against so much goodness, and against God, who has shown them so much favour, loved them so greatly, and bestowed such blessings of grace upon them. 3a6e. It appears that the sinner in repentance has to do with God, by confessing his sin and his sorrow for it; and also others glorify God for granting repentance to him as the Christian Jews did on the behalf of the Gentiles (Acts 11:18), and even there is joy in heaven, and God is glorified by the angels there, on account even of one sinner that repents (Luke 15:7,10). 3b.

Secondly, the subjects of repentance are sinners, and only such; Adam, in a state of innocence, was not a subject of repentance, for not having sinned he had no sin to repent of; and such who fancy themselves to be perfectly righteous, and without sin in their own apprehensions, stand in no need of repentance, and therefore Christ says, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matthew 9:13; Luke 15:7). Now, 3b1. All men are sinners, all descending from Adam by ordinary generation; all his posterity being seminally in him, and represented by him when he sinned, sinned in him, and they both have his sin imputed to them, and a corrupt nature derived from him; and so are transgressors from the womb, and are all guilty of actual sins and transgressions; and so all stand in need of repentance, even such who trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others as less holy than themselves, and think they need no repentance: yet they do; and not only they, but such who are in the best sense righteous need daily repentance, since they are continually sinning in all they do. 3b2.

Men of all nations, Jews and Gentiles, are the subjects of repentance; for all are under sin, under the power of it, involved in the guilt of it, and liable to punishment for it, and God has commanded "all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). During the time of John the Baptist, and of our Lord's being on earth, the doctrine of repentance was only preached to the Jews; but after the resurrection of Christ he gave his apostles an instruction and order "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name

among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47), in consequence of which the apostles first exhorted the Jews and then the Gentiles to repent, and particularly the apostle Paul "testified both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance towards God", as well as "faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). 3b3.

Men are only subjects of repentance in the present life; when this life is ended, and the gospel dispensation is over, and Christ is come a second time, the door of repentance as well as of faith will be shut, and there will be no place found for it; no opportunity nor means of it; nor any subjects capable of it; as for the saints in heaven they need it not, being entirely without sin; and as for the wicked in hell, they are in utter despair, and not capable of repentance unto life, and unto salvation not to be repented of, and though there is weeping and wailing there, yet no repentance; hence the rich man in hell was so solicitous to have Lazarus sent to his brethren living, hoping, that by means of one that came to them from the dead to warn them of the place of torment, they would repent, as well knowing they never would if not in the present life, and before they came into the place where he was; and therefore repentance is not to be procrastinated. 4.

The Author, and cause, and means of repentance. 4a. The Author and efficient cause of it is not man himself, but God; "then hath God also granted repentance to the Gentiles" (Acts 11:18), it is not in the power of man to repent of himself, for he is by nature blind, and has no sight and sense of sin; his understanding is darkened with respect unto it, and he is darkness itself till made light in the Lord; and until he has a sight and sense of sin he can never truly repent of it; his heart is hard and obdurate, his heart is an heart of stone, and he cannot really repent of sin until that stony heart is taken away, and an heart of flesh is given; and whenever he becomes sensible of his need of repentance, he prays to God for it, saying, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned": nor do exhortations to repentance suppose it in the power of man to repent of himself; since these are only designed to bring him to a sense of his need of it, and of his obligation to it, and of his impotence to it of himself through the hardness of his heart, and to direct him to seek it of God, who only can give it; for, 4b.

Though God may give men space to repent, yet if he does not give the grace of repentance, they never will repent. Thus he gave space to the old world, threatened with a flood, which some think is meant by the one hundred and twenty years allowed them, when the longsuffering of God waited in the times of Noah, while the ark was preparing, but without effect; so Jezebel, or Antichrist, is said to have "space" given her "to repent of her fornication, and she repented not" (Rev. 2:21), and this God sometimes gives to the children of men to show his sovereignty, that he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and give repentance to whom he pleases; and for the sake of his elect, not willing that any of them should perish, but that they should all come to repentance, and therefore his longsuffering towards them is salvation; and this also he sometimes gives to show his forbearance of the vessels of wrath, and to leave them inexcusable.

Nay, 4c. Though some men have the means of repentance, yet grace not being given them of God they repent not; the word, unless attended with power, is ineffectual; the most severe judgments inflicted on men are insufficient, as the plagues on Pharaoh, whose heart was the worse and more hardened under them (Ex. 11:10), and though the children of Israel were smitten with famine, with the pestilence, and with the sword, yet they repented not, nor returned unto the Lord (Amos 4:6-11), so the fourth and fifth vials poured forth on men, which will scorch and fill them with pains and sores, instead of repenting of their deeds they will blaspheme the God of heaven and his name (Rev. 16:8-11).

And on the other hand, the greatest instances of mercy and goodness to men, and singular deliverances wrought for them, which should, and one would think would, lead men to repentance, and yet they do not (Rom. 2:4,5; Rev. 9:20,21), yea the most powerful and awakening ministry that a man can sit under, has no influence on the minds of men to bring them to repentance, without the power and grace of God; such as was the ministry of John the Baptist, who was the voice of one crying in the wilderness, preaching in a loud, vehement, and powerful manner, the baptism of repentance; and yet though some publicans and harlots believed, the Pharisees repented not afterwards that they might believe (Matthew 21:32), our Lord spake as one having authority, yet few believed; and many cities where he preached, and mighty works were done by him, yet repented not; and if one was to rise from the dead, and describe all the happiness of the blissful state of the saints in heaven he was capable of, or paint all the horrors of the damned in hell, it would have no effect, neither to allure nor frighten to repentance, or bring men to it, without the exertion of powerful and efficacious grace (Luke 16:31). 4d.

The sole efficient cause and author of repentance is God, Father, Son, and Spirit. God the Father, "if God peradventure will give them repentance" (2 Tim. 2:25). Christ, the Son of God, as mediator, is exalted "to give repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31), and the Spirit of God reproves for sin, convinces of it, and works repentance for it (John 16:8). 4e. The moving cause of it is the free grace of God; it is a grant and favour from him, a gift of Christ, which he, as a prince and a savior bestows (Acts 11:18; 5:31), and an operation of the power and grace of the Spirit of God, and entirely flows from the sovereign will and mercy of God, "who hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom. 9:18), not giving grace to repent. 4f.

The usual means and instruments of repentance are the word, and the ministers of it; as faith, so repentance, comes by hearing the word; the three thousand were pricked to the heart, and were brought to repentance, through the ministry of the apostle Peter; and as all the apostles were ordered by Christ to preach repentance in his name among all nations, so they went forth everywhere, and God in and by their ministry commanded all men everywhere to repent; and when and where the command was attended with power it produced the effect; and so the apostle Paul declared to Jews and Gentiles, that "they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance"; and the hand of the Lord being with him, great numbers everywhere believed and turned to the Lord (Luke 24:47; Acts 17:30 26:20). 5.

The effects and consequences of repentance; such effects as are evidences of it, and show it to be genuine; and such consequences which are salutary, and show the blessings of grace are connected with it. 5a. First, the effects of it, which prove it to be genuine; such as the apostle mentions as fruits of godly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:11). 5a1. "Carefulness" to exercise repentance in a proper way, and to bring forth fruits meet for it; carefulness not to sin any more in a like manner, or to live a sinful course of life, but to abstain from all appearance of evil; and carefulness not to offend God again, who had been so good and gracious to them. 5a2.

"Clearing of themselves"; not by denying the fact, as Gehazi, nor by extenuating and palliating it as Adam, but by an ingenuous confession of it, praying it might be forgiven, and that they might be cleansed from all sin by the blood of Jesus; so clearing themselves from the charges of hardness of heart, impenitence, and ingratitude, and of neglect of repentance when sin was discovered to them. 5a3. "Indignation"; against sin, expressing their abhorrence of it, and of themselves for it, as Job did, saying, what have we to do with it for the future? being filled with a loathing of it, and with shame and confusion for it; (see Hosea 14:8). 5a4.

"Fear"; not of the punishment of sin, of the wrath of God, and of hell and damnation, which is the fruit of legal and not evangelical repentance; but a fear of offending God, and of his grace and goodness in forgiving their sins, and of him for his goodness sake (Hosea 3:5). 5a5. "Vehement desire"; to be kept from sin, that they may not dishonor God, grieve their own souls, offend and stumble God's people, and bring reproach on his ways, doctrines, and ordinances; and that they might be indulged with nearness to God, communion with him, and fresh discoveries of his love to them. 5a6.

"Zeal"; for God and his glory, for his doctrines and ordinances, for the discipline of his house, and for the performance of all good works. 5a7. "Revenge"; not on others but on themselves, and on their sinful lusts and corruptions, and on all disobedience, that their obedience might be fulfilled; striving against sin, acting the part of an antagonist to it, resisting even unto blood, not sparing but mortifying the deeds of the body, that they may live a holy life and conversation.

But though these things are in a more peculiar manner applicable to the case of the Corinthians, yet they do more or less, and in a great measure appear in every repenting sinner. 5b. Secondly, the consequences of repentance, even blessings of grace, which follow upon it, and are connected with it, being promised unto it, and what it issues in; by which it appears to be salutary, and answers some valuable ends, and is of the greatest importance; as, 5b1. The pardon of sin; for though this is not procured by tears of repentance, by humiliation for sin, and confession of it, but by the blood of Christ only; yet to those who repent of sin sincerely, and are truly humbled for it, a manifestation and application of pardoning grace and mercy is made; and these two, repentance and remission of sins, are joined together in the ministry of the word, to encourage repenting sinners to hope in Christ for the forgiveness of their sin, who as he gives the one gives also the other (Luke 24:47; Acts 5:31), none that ever truly repented of sin and confessed it, but had his sins pardoned; such as forsake their sinful ways and turn to the Lord, he pardons and abundantly pardons; his justice to the blood and sacrifice of his Son, and his truth and faithfulness to his word and promises, leave no room to doubt of it (Isa. 55:7; 1 John 1:9). 5b2.

True evangelical repentance, which is God's gift, and a grant of his grace, is "repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). It is not by repentance indeed by which men live spiritually, that is by faith in Christ; yet men begin to live spiritually when they are quickened by the Spirit of God, and have repentance from dead works given unto them; and though men by repentance do not procure eternal life, that is the free gift of God through Christ, yet true, special, spiritual, and evangelical repentance issues in eternal life, and is inseparably connected with it; though all impenitent sinners shall certainly perish, who by their hardness and impenitent hearts treasure up wrath against the day of wrath and righteous judgment of God; yet all that come to true repentance none of them shall ever perish, but shall have everlasting life. 5b3.

Evangelical repentance, the work of godly sorrow, is "repentance to salvation not to be repented of" (2 Cor. 7:10), it is not the cause of salvation; Christ is the captain, cause, and author of salvation; but the means through and by which God saves his people; as they are saved "through faith", so through repentance, and through both as "the gift of God", flowing from his sovereign grace (Eph. 2:8), as he "that believes" with the heart unto righteousness, so he that truly repents of sin "shall be saved" (Mark 16:16).
ENDNOTES:

[1] h metanoia auth filosofiaV arch ginetai, &c. Hierocles in Carmin, Pythagor. p. 166.

[2] "Ultrices Curae", Virgil. Aeneid. 6.

[3] "Caeteri autem resipiscere, id est, ad priorem mentis statum. vel ad meliorem mentem redire solent", Vallae Elegantiar. l. 5. c. 3.

[4] Institut. l. 6. c. 24.

[5] "Quem poenitet peccasse pene est innocens", Senecae Agamemnon; act 2. v. 241. Another heathen calls repentance, "Omnium fortunatissimum factum", the most happy deed of all, Terent. Heautont. act 4. sc. 7. v. 1.

[6] Clemens of Alexandria, Stromat. l. 1. p. 310, had a notion that the devil being possessed of free will might be brought to repentance, which perhaps gave rise to the sentiment of Origen concerning the salvation of devils; but, according to Luther, free will is the greatest enemy to righteousness, and to the salvation of men; and if so, then certainly to the salvation of devils, and can be no friend nor of any service to them, Luther de serv. Arbitr. c. 211.

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