



The  
*Catherine Booth*  
Collection

HIGHWAY OF OUR GOD

## PART I: ENTERING THE HIGHWAY

### CHAPTER ONE: What is Repentance?

IN the mouths of three witnesses—John the Baptist, Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul—this word shall be established, that repentance is an indispensable condition of entering the Kingdom of God.

People generally are all at sea on this subject, as though insisting that repentance were an arbitrary arrangement on the part of God. I believe God has made human salvation as easy as His almighty, infinite mind could make it. But there is a necessity in the case that we should 'repent and turn to God.' It is just as necessary that my feelings be changed and brought to repentance toward God as it is that the wicked, disobedient boy should have his feelings brought back into harmony with his father before he can be forgiven. Precisely the same laws of mind are brought into action in both cases, and there is the same necessity in both.

If any father has a prodigal son, I ask, how is it that you are not reconciled to your son? You love him intensely. Probably you are more conscious of your love for him than for any other of your children. Your heart yearns over him, you pray for him, you dream of him, your bowels yearn over him. Why are you not reconciled? Why are you obliged to hold him at arm's length and not have him come in and out, and live with you on the same terms as the affectionate, obedient daughter? 'Oh!' you say, 'the case is different. I cannot. It is not "I would not", but "I cannot". Before that can possibly be the boy's feelings must be changed toward me. He has mistaken notions and thinks I am hard and exacting. I have done all a father could do, but he will go on in defiance of my will. You say, 'As a wise and righteous father I must insist on a change in him. He must confess his sin and ask me to forgive him. Then I should run to meet him and put my arms around his neck!' But there is a 'cannot' in the case.

Just so. It is not that God does not love you, sinner, or that the great benevolent heart of God has not, as it were, wept tears of blood over you. It is not that He would not put His loving arms around you this moment if you would only come to His feet, and confess your wrong, and seek His pardon. He cannot. The laws of His universe are against His doing so. The good of, it may be, millions of immortal beings is involved. He dare not and cannot until there is a change of mind in you. You must repent. 'Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.'



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Well, if repentance be an indispensable condition of salvation, let us try to find out what repentance really is. How full of confusion the world and the Church are upon this subject!

Repentance is not merely conviction of sin. If it were, what a different world we should have, for there are tens of thousands on whose hearts God's Spirit has done His office by convincing them of sin. We should be perfectly astounded if we had any conception of the multitudes whom God has convinced of sin, as he did Agrippa and Festus. They are convinced of sin, but they go no further. That is not repentance. They live this week as they did last.

Neither is repentance mere sorrow for sin. I have seen people weep bitterly and writhe and struggle, yet hug their idols, and vain has it been to try to shake them from them. If Jesus Christ would have saved them with those idols they would have had no objection at all. If they could have got through the strait gate with one particular idol they would have gone through long since, but to part with it is another thing. Some people will weep like your stubborn child when you want him to do something which he does not want to do.

He will cry, and when you apply the rod he will cry harder, but he will not yield. When he yields he becomes a penitent, but until he does he is merely a convicted sinner.

When God applies the rod of His Spirit, of His providence, of His word, sinners will cry, and wince, and whine, and make you believe they are praying and want to be saved, but all the while they are holding their necks as stiff as iron. They will not submit. The moment they submit they become true penitents and are saved. There is no mistake more common than for people to suppose they are penitents when they are not.

Repentance, therefore, is not mere sorrow for sin. A man may be ever so sorry and all the way down to death be hugging some forbidden thing, as the young ruler hugged his possessions. But that is not repentance.

Neither is repentance a promise that you will forsake sin in the future. If it were there would be many more penitents. There is scarcely a poor drunkard that does not promise, in his own mind, or to his poor wife, or somebody, that he will forsake his cups. There is scarcely any kind of a sinner who does not continually promise that he will one day give up his sin and turn to God, but he does not do it.



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What then is repentance? Repentance is simply renouncing sin—turning round from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God. This is giving up sin in your heart, in purpose, in desire, resolving that you will give up every evil thing, and that you will do it now. Of course this involves sorrow; for how will any sane man turn himself round from a given course into another if he does not repent having taken that forbidden course? It implies, also, hatred of the course he formerly took, and from which he turns.

He is like the prodigal who, when he sat in the swine-yard amongst the husks and the filth, fully resolved, and at last acted. He went, and that was the test of his penitence. He might have sat resolving and promising till now, if he had lived as long, and he would never have got the father's kiss, the father's welcome, if he had not started; but he went, and went to his father honestly and said 'I have sinned'—which implied a great deal more in his language then than it does in ours now. Then comes the proof of his submission, 'and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants'—put me in a stable, or set me to clean the boots, so that I can be in thy family and have thy smile. That is Jesus Christ's own beautiful illustration of true penitence.

Submission is the test of penitence. My child may be willing to do a hundred and fifty other things, but if he is not willing to submit on the one point of controversy he is a rebel, and remains one until he yields.

Here is just the difference between a spurious and a real repentance. I am afraid we have had in our churches thousands who had a spurious repentance: they were convinced of sin—they were sorry for it; they wanted to live a better life, to love God in a sort of general way; but they skipped over the real point of controversy with God; they hid it from their pastor, perhaps, and from the deacons, and from the people who talked with them.

Abraham might have been willing to give up every other thing he possessed, but if he had not been willing to give up Isaac, all else would have been useless. It is your Isaac that God wants. You have got an Isaac, just as the young ruler had his possessions. You have got something that you are holding on to, that the Holy Spirit says you must let go, and you say, 'I can't.' Very well; then you must stop outside the Kingdom.

Then another difficulty comes in, and people say, 'I have not the power to repent.' There is a grand



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mistake. You have the power, or God would not command it. You can repent. You can this moment lift up your eyes to Heaven and say, with the prodigal, 'Father, I have sinned, and I renounce my sin.' You may not be able to weep. God nowhere requires or commands that.

But you are able, this very moment, to renounce sin in purpose, in resolution. Mind you do not confound the renouncing of the sin with the power of saving yourself from it. If you renounce it, Jesus will come and save you from it, like the man with the withered hand whom Jesus intended to heal. Where was the power to come from to heal him? From Jesus. The benevolence, the love, that prompted that healing all came from Jesus; but Jesus wanted a condition, and that was the response of the man's will. So He said, 'Stretch forth thine hand.' If the man had been like some of you he would have said, 'What an unreasonable command. You know I cannot do it.' Jesus wanted that 'I will, Lord' to be inside the man, the response of his will. The moment he said that, Jesus supplied strength. He stretched forth his hand and you know what happened.

Stretch out your withered hand, whatever it may be, and say, 'I will, Lord.' You have the power and mind, you have the obligation, which is universal and immediate. God 'now commandeth all men everywhere to repent' and to believe the gospel. What a tyrant He must be if He commands that and yet knows you have not the power!

Now, do not say, 'I do not feel enough.' Do you feel enough to be willing to forsake your sin? That is the point. Any man who does not repent enough to forsake his sin is not a penitent at all. When you repent enough to forsake your sin, that moment your repentance is sincere and you may take hold of Jesus with a firm grasp. Then 'believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.'