

REPENTENCE

Comrades and Friends, — It is important that we should understand Repentance, seeing that it is a condition on which God bestows His mercy upon wrongdoers. We have all sinned, and exposed ourselves to the penalty that follows the law we have broken. Without repentance there is no Salvation. What Jesus Christ said is true of all men, 'Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.'

When men and women come to their senses about the folly of wrongdoing, repentance is usually their first thought. They feel that it is the right thing; nay, the only thing they can do that will bring peace to their consciences, and satisfaction to those whom they have injured.

There is no story in the Bible more tender and effective, or which has made a greater impression on all mankind wherever it has been related, than that which describes the broken-hearted repentance of the Prodigal Son, followed by his return home and his welcome there. Whenever we hear that parable we feel he did the right thing, and it is a satisfaction to us to see him weep over his sins, and offer himself for any form of obedience that his father might choose.

Now, I think you will all see that there are different kinds of repentance.

1. There is the repentance that is like the morning cloud and the early dew. It soon passes away, leaving little or no trace behind.

This was too often the character of the repentance of the Israelites of old. They acknowledged their sins, sorrowed on account of them, and promised never to do the like again; but very quickly they relapsed, and became as bad or worse than they were before.

We are all of us only too familiar with instances of this class of repentance in our own circles. We have frequently met with them in our Halls, and we may count ourselves very fortunate if we do not find some in our own experience.

2. Then, there is the repentance of despair.



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That was the repentance of Judas. When he realized the deep, black sin he had committed, the Devil tempted him to believe that there could be no mercy for such a sinner as he was. And, then, instead of going to the feet of the Saviour – whom he had so cruelly wronged – and seeking forgiveness, he there himself headlong into the abyss from which there was no deliverance.

Thank God, none of us yet have sinned after that fashion.

3. And, then, there is the repentance that needeth not to be repented of.

Such was the repentance of the dying thief. He attended no Bible-class; heard no sermon; knew very little about theology; partook of no sacraments; and yet his was the repentance of the heart. The Master declared it to be genuine. It landed him in Heaven.

Perhaps there is a backslider here who will not repent. Ah! That is a greater pity still! There is a text in the Revelation that always impresses me very powerfully when I read it. It applies with force to such impenitent souls as those of whom I am speaking 'I gave her space for repentance, and she repented not.' Is that to be said of you when the opportunity for repentance is for ever gone?

4. But, then, there are those here, thank God, who have repented, and whose repentance has been sincere, and that repentance has brought great blessing into their lives.

Now to you, I should like to propose an important question. Have you been true to the repentance you professed?

You remember when you came to God, and knelt at the Mercy-Seat, and you remember what you said and did there. You said you hated the falsehoods of the past, and that you would never be guilty of them again. Have you ever been true to that declaration?

You confessed the uncleanness and lusts and abominable practices of the past, and promised that you would renounce the companions and the follies that led to them. Have you been true to that promise?



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You confessed with shame and regret your neglect of prayer and of your Bible, and your rejections of mercy; and you promised to live a new life, and to do what you could to help Jesus Christ and His people in their struggle with the godless world. Have you been true to those pledges?

Those promises were a part of your repentance. It would never have been accepted if unaccompanied by a complete renunciation of what you knew to be evil, and an entire consecration to the life which you felt to be your duty.

If you have not been true to those pledges; that is, if you have not lived in the spirit of those vows, they must be repeated, and repeated in earnest, and maintained when repeated, or God will surely depart from you.

5. But there is another repentance on which I would like to have a word – and that is, repentance on behalf of other people.

If the people who sin will not themselves repent of their evil doings and their ill-treatment of Jesus Christ, then it is our duty to repent for them. Was not this the repentance which Jesus Christ Himself practiced? Did He not repent for Jerusalem when He wept over it?

I daresay you may remember the story I tell sometimes of the little girl, in Salvation Army uniform, who came to the Penitent-Form, weeping bitterly. The Sergeant knelt by her side, and said, 'My dear, what is the matter? Have you been led into telling a story?'

'No, Sergeant,' she replied.

'Have you lost your temper, or been using bad words?'

'No,' said the child.

'What, then, have you come here for, my dear?'

'Oh,' said the child, sobbing, 'I have come here for my mother. She won't come to the Penitent-Form herself, and so I have come for her.'

The Sergeant comforted the child, and the feeling came into her heart that God would save her mother. So, running home and leaping on her mother's lap, and throwing her arms around her neck, she burst out: 'O mother, mother, I've been to the Penitent-Form for you. Now you must



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go there yourself! I am sure Jesus will save you.’ The mother did go to the Mercy-Seat for herself, and found that Salvation which all find who go there in sincerity.

Do you ever practice this kind of repentance? You sometimes condemn and scold the sinner but do you ever weep over them? You are angry with the backsliders that hinder your Meetings, but do you ever repent for them? Perhaps you have a wife or a husband, or a boy or a girl, or some one else under your roof who is trampling under foot the Blood of Christ, and counting it an unholy thing. If there be no one inside your home belonging to that class, there are sadly too many outside. Does their sin or their danger ever cause you grief?

I go to Berlin every year, or nearly so, on a day specially set apart by the German nation, and which they call Repentance Day. It is intended, I believe, that on this day the whole nation should confess and repent of its sin. That is a wise custom, not only for Germany, but for every nation, and it might set aside one day in the year upon which the entire Army could be called upon to repent, not only for the sins of the whole world.

When I visit Berlin I hold two Meetings there, in the great building known as the Circus Busch. We have four or five thousand people present at each Meetings, and we see a large number of Penitents at the Mercy-Seat.

I have no doubt you would all like to be there with me on one of these occasions. Well, circumstances make that impossible; but can you not set apart one particular Sunday for Repentance Day at your Corps? And could you not on such an occasion go down before God, weep and agonize over the little progress made in your neighborhood, and mourn over the feebleness of your fightings and the awful sins and terrible dangers of your unsaved neighbours?

Your affectionate General,
William Booth.