

2. It is a most necessary grace ; for it is that which brings Christ and the soul together. And without it, it is impossible to please God, Heb. xi. 6.

3. It is of perpetual use while here ; it is an eye, hand, and foot to the soul, Psal. xxvii. 3 ; and at death it does the last office to the man, supports him when all other comforts fail, Heb. xi. 13.

4. *Lastly*, Seek faith to have it wrought, actuated, and strengthened in you ; and for that cause, diligently attend ordinances, the preaching of the word particularly ; for ‘ faith cometh by hearing,’ Rom. x. 17.



OF REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE.

ACTS xi. 18.—*Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

REPENTANCE is an inseparable companion of faith, so that the soul blessed with faith in Christ will be also endowed with repentance towards God.

This is a conclusion drawn by the believing Jews from the account Peter had given them of what passed with respect to his receiving the Gentiles into Christian fellowship, with which they rest satisfied, namely, *That God had given repentance to the Gentiles.* Where consider,

1. A blessing granted ; *repentance unto life* ; so called, to distinguish it from legal repentance, and the sorrow that is unto death. This true repentance is unto life ; for, by God’s appointment, it must go before eternal life ; and whoso have it shall be sure of that.

2. The parties to whom it was granted ; *the Gentiles*, those who were once without hope and without God in the world.

3. The author of it, *God*. It is his gift, as well as faith is. He works it in the heart.

The doctrine of the text is,

DOCT. ‘ To those whom God designs for life, he gives repentance unto life. They come all through this strait gate who enter into life.’

Or, ‘ Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience.’

Here I shall show,

1. What are the kinds of repentance.

II. The general nature of repentance unto life.

III. Who is the author of this repentance.

IV. The springs of it.

V. The parts thereof.

VI. Deduce an inference or two for application.

I am to shew, what are the kinds of repentance. They are two.

1. Legal repentance, such as was in Judas, and may be in other reprobates, and so is not saving, Matth. xxvii. 3. being produced by law terrors, without gospel-grace changing the heart.

2. Evangelical repentance, peculiar to the elect, which is that in the text, and is the only true and saving repentance, of which we speak. The general difference betwixt them lies here, that in this last, one repents of his sin as it is sin, or offensive to God, as David did, Psal. li. 4. saying, 'Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight;' in the other, only as it brings wrath on him, Gen. iv. 13.

II. I proceed to shew, the general nature of repentance unto life. It is a saving grace, 2 Tim. iii. 25. disposing the soul unto all the acts of turning from sin unto God.

1. It is not a transient action, a sigh for sin, a pang of sorrow for it, which goes away again; but it is an abiding grace, a new frame and disposition, fixed in the heart, disposing one to turn from sin to God on all occasions, Zech. xii. 10. 'I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.'

2. Nor yet a passing work of the first days of one's religion; but a grace in the heart, setting one to an answerable working all their days. The heart being smitten with repentance at conversion, the wound is never bound up to bleed no more, till the band of glory be put about it.

3. It is not a common grace, as legal repentance is, but a saving one; distinguishing one from a hypocrite, and having a necessary connexion with eternal life.

III. I shall shew, who is the author of this repentance.

1. Not men themselves; it is not owing to one's natural powers, Jer. xxii. 23. 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.' The stony heart is beyond man's power to remove.

2. It is God's free gift, and wrought by the power of his Spirit in the heart, Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. 'A new heart also will I give you,

and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them,' Jer. xxxi. 18, 19. 'I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.' Sometimes notorious sinners become penitents, as Manasseh, Paul, &c. Where he is the matter, the knottiest timber is as easy for the Spirit to work as any other, Zech. xii. 10. forecited.

The means the Spirit makes use of is the word; hence we read of preaching repentance. And (1.) The law serves to break the hard heart, Jer. xxiii. 29. 'Is not my word like a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?' It is like the Baptist preparing the way for the Messiah's coming. Hence it is called 'The Spirit of bondage,' Rom. viii. 15. (2.) The gospel serves to melt the hard heart, like a fire, Jer. xxiii. 29. forecited; and so bow and bend it from sin unto God. The soul is driven by the law, but drawn by the gospel. The Lord comes in the still small voice.

IV. I proceed to show, the springs of this repentance. There are two opened in the heart by the Holy Spirit.

1. A true sense of sin. And in this there are two things.

(1.) A sight of it, Psal. li. 3. 'My sin is ever before me.' The man's eyes are opened, and he sees his sinfulness of nature, heart, lip, and life; the evil of his sin, in the misery and danger of it to himself, and the dishonour it does to God.

(1.) A painful feeling of it, Acts ii. 37. The sin which sat light on them before, becomes a burden which they are not able to bear; for now they are roused out of their lethargy and feel their sores: it is a burden on their spirits, backs, and heads. They are filled with terror, anguish, and remorse, at the sight, as was the Philippian jailor, xvi. 30. This is necessary for repentance, because otherwise the sinner will never part with his sin, nor prize Christ and his grace, Rev. iii. 17. He will reign as king without Christ, till he feel his lost estate, as did the prodigal, Luke xv.

2. An apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, Joel ii. 12, 13. 'Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning. And rend your heart and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of

the evil.' The eye of faith is opened to see and believe, that there is forgiveness and mercy to a poor sinner, that though the sinner has destroyed himself, yet in God is his help; there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. This can only be apprehended aright through Jesus Christ, Zech. xii. 10. forecited. Not mercy for mercy's sake, but Christ's sake: 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself,' &c. This is necessary. For without it, one will either, (1.) Go on in secret despair, casting off the thoughts of his case, and making the best of it he can, Jer. ii. 25. 'Thou saidst There is no hope. No: for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.' Or, (2.) Lie down in tormenting despair, like Judas. Both which will fix sin in the heart, and bar out repentance. And since God is a consuming fire to the workers of iniquity, and without satisfaction there can be no remission, there is no apprehending of mercy but through Christ.

V. I proceed to shew, the parts of repentance. These are two, humiliation and conversion, Joel ii. 12, 13. above quoted.

1. Humiliation. The sinner goes from God by the high-way of pride and self-conceit; but always comes back the low way of humiliation. Grace pulls him down from the seat of the scorner, and lays him at the Lord's feet, 1 Pet. v. 6. 'Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.' It makes him like Benhadad's servants, who came to the king of Israel girded with sackcloth, and ropes on their heads, in the most humiliating posture. In it there is,

(1.) Sorrow for sin, a kindly sorrow for the offence and dishonour done to a holy gracious God, Zech. xii. 10. formerly cited, defacing his image, transgressing his law, grieving his Spirit, and furnishing spear and nails to pierce a Saviour.

(2.) Shame, a holy shame for sin, Rom. vi. 21. 'What fruit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?' They see now their spiritual nakedness, pollution, disappointed expectations from sin, and reproach discovered, which fill the soul with blushing.

(3.) Self-loathing, Ezek. xxxvi. 31. 'Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loath yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities, and for your abominations.' They see a fulness of sin in them, and the complicated aggravations of their sin, which make them to smite on their breast, as the publican did, Luke xviii. 13. as deserving to be pierced through the heart it bred in; to smite on the thigh, as Ephraim did, Jer. xxxi. 19. as if he desired to break the legs that carried him out of God's way.

(4.) Penitent confession, Jer. iii. 13. accusing and condemning themselves.

2. Conversion, or returning. Of which there are two parts.

1st, Turning away from sin, 2 Tim. ii. 19. To repent of sin, and continue in the habitual practice of it, is a contradiction. They turn from it,

(1.) In heart, by a hearty and sincere hatred of it. Psal. cxix. 104. 'I hate every false way.' They hate it as an evil, the worst of evils, worse than sufferings. They hate it sincerely as sin, universally and irreconcilably. They look on it as God does, as that abominable thing which he hates.

(2.) In their life and conversation; they get clean hands.

[1.] They turn from the gross pollutions of the outward man, in the habitual practice of these, Psal. xxiv. 3, 4. 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? and who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lift up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.' A profane life is the mark of an impenitent state, Gal. v. 21. 'They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.' The true godly may make gross slips; but if they be habitually gross in their lives, there is no difference betwixt Christ's sheep and the devil's goats. [2.] They are tender with respect to sins of common infirmity, making conscience of words and action, as Paul did, Acts xxiv. 16. 'Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.' What others count light, they will count great: even these as burdens to them, which they groan under, and as iron fetters they would fain be freed of, Rom. vii. 24. 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'

2dly, Turning to God. By faith man returns to God as a portion, by repentance as a Lord and Master, like a runaway servant. And he returns,

(1.) To God himself. Sinners departing from God, dislike not only their service, but their Master, Luke xix. 14. But returning they are disposed to love him and like him as a Master.

(2.) To his duty to God, Acts ix. 6. to the practice of every known duty, and spirituality in duty. This is new obedience, which a penitent turns to, [1.] In full purpose, Psal. cxix. 106. no more doubting whether to fall in with it or not, or delaying or putting it off any more. [2.] In sincere endeavours, Acts xxiv. 6.*

Inf. 1. An impenitent heart is a sad sign of a lost state, Rom. ii. 5. While thou livest so, thou art far from God; and if thou die so, thou art lost for ever.

* A large and particular account of the nature, author, necessity, &c. of repentance, may be seen in several discourses in a volume of the author's sermons, first published in 1756, which were preached only two or three years before he delivered this discourse; which may partly account for the brevity of it.

2. That repentance which is not evangelical and true is little worth. You must have more than Judah's repentance, if ever you see heaven.

3. To pretend to repentance, and never forsake sin, is vain.

4. To leave sin, and not take up the contrary duties, is not repentance.

5. Go to the Lord by faith for the grace of repentance.

OF CHRIST'S ORDINANCES IN GENERAL.

ISA. xii. 3.—*Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.*

THIS song looks to the days of the gospel, wherein Christ having come and purchased salvation, the tidings of it are carried through the world in the gospel, and it is communicated to Jews and Gentiles through the means of grace. Here we have,

1. A benefit to be had in the church, *water*, i. e. gospel grace, the benefits of Christ's redemption, as suitable to needy, fainting souls, as water to the thirsty. See John iv. 14. and vii. 37.

2. The way of its communication to poor sinners. It is to be *drawn out of the wells of salvation*. These are gospel-ordinances, the wells in this valley of Baca for the life of souls, and refreshment of spiritual travellers. All the elect capable to draw, do draw out of them. This is the sense, whether the allusion be to the wells in the wilderness for the Israelites, or to the Jews fetching water out of the spring of Siloam at the feast of tabernacles in the night, with mirth and music, to the temple, and pouring it on the altar.

The text furnishes this doctrine.

DOCT. 'The Lord's ordinances are the wells of salvation to the elect.' Or, 'The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are, his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.'

Here I shall shew,

I. What is understood by a means of salvation.

II. What are these means of salvation.

III. What makes any ordinance a mean of grace.

IV. To whom are the Lord's ordinances made effectual.

V. Whence their efficacy proceeds.

VI. Deduce an inference or two.