

THE NATURE AND PRACTICE OF REPENTANCE

WILLIAM PERKINS



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ABOUT THIS BOOK



Two treatises bound together in urgent pastoral purpose. The first defines **repentance** as a work of grace — examining its causes, parts (mortification and new obedience), degrees, and the daily practice of examination, confession, and prayer. Legal and evangelical **motives** press the reader toward immediate action. The second treatise expounds Galatians 5:17, tracing the ongoing **combat of flesh and spirit** within every believer and showing how this conflict shapes Christian experience, humility, and perseverance.



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TITLE PAGE



Two treatises. 1. Of the nature and practice of repentance. 2. Of the combat of the flesh and spirit.

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TO THE READER



For many years, God has blessed this land with great prosperity, peace, and an abundance of every temporal blessing the heart could wish for.

That prosperity has been abused, and it has given rise to many grievous sins against both tables of the law — especially atheism, neglect of God's worship, contempt of the word, profaning the Sabbath, abusing the sacraments, and more.

These sins and others like them have long called down judgments from heaven upon us — all the more so because the preaching of the word has had little effect in bringing us to any amendment of life.

So God has now begun to let His judgments seize upon us, especially through plague and pestilence — striking even the most important parts of this land — by which He himself, as Job says, whispers in our ear and preaches repentance to us (Job 36:15).

Therefore, now more than ever, we must look to ourselves. If we have not yet repented, we must begin. If we have repented before, we must do so more earnestly.

If we harden our hearts against both His word and His judgments, and push the day of reckoning far from our minds, we will undoubtedly face judgments far more terrible than any we have experienced — or worse, eternal destruction. Let us take warning from the generation before the flood, who ignored Noah's preaching and drowned; from Lot's sons-in-law, who laughed at his warning and were burned with fire and brimstone from heaven; and from the foolish virgins, who were sleeping when they should have been filling their lamps, and were shut out from the wedding of the Lamb (Genesis 19:14).

To give you some direction in the practice of repentance, I have written this small treatise. Use it for your benefit, and be sure to put it into practice — otherwise you will be willfully taking your own soul's life.

Two sermons on repentance have already been published in English — one by Mr. Bradford, martyr, and the other by Mr. Arthur Dent — sermons that have done much good. My purpose is not to add to them or to teach any different doctrine, but only to renew and refresh the memory of what they have already taught.

Do not be troubled if the leading theologians of this age, whom I follow in this treatise, seem to differ in how they treat repentance. Some make it a fruit of faith, containing two parts: mortification and vivification. Others make faith a part of repentance, dividing it into contrition, faith, and new obedience. The difference is not in the substance of the doctrine, but in the logical approach to it. This difference in approach arises from how the word repentance is understood. It is used in two ways: broadly and narrowly. Broadly, it refers to the whole conversion of a sinner, and in that sense it may include contrition, faith, and new obedience.

Narrowly, it refers to the renewal of one's life and conduct, and in that sense it is a fruit of faith. It is this narrower sense that I follow in this treatise.

I have added a few pages on the combat between the flesh and the spirit, because repentance and this combat go together — one is never practiced without the other, as is clear from a careful reading of Psalm 51.

Spirit: Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your loving kindness.

Flesh: Indeed, but this adultery of yours contains countless sins — so expect no pardon.

Spirit: According to the multitude of Your compassions, put away my iniquities.

Flesh: This sin has taken such deep root in you that it will hardly be pardoned.

Spirit: Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

Flesh: Your greatest offense is against another person.

Spirit: Against You, against You only have I sinned, etc.

Flesh: Except for this one sin, your life has been blameless.

Spirit: Behold, I was born in iniquity, etc.

Indeed, even the best man, in his practice of godliness, will sometimes seem unlike himself — and the cause is this spiritual combat. The flesh sometimes makes him grieve and mourn and go about in dejection. Then soon after, the spirit puts courage into him and makes him triumph over the flesh, the devil, and the world. Moses was courageous at the Red Sea, but he failed at the

waters of strife. Job first praised God, and afterward spoke blasphemously. David frequently despaired in his misery, yet was quickly revived. There is therefore good reason why the consideration of repentance and the combat should go together — so that no one, after beginning to repent, imagines that life will be easy for the flesh, as though we would go to heaven on beds of ease. Rather, we should be fully resolved that when we begin to do anything pleasing to God, we will face nothing but constant trouble from our corrupt and rebellious natures (Exodus 14:13; Numbers 20:11-12; Job 1:21; Job 3:1; Psalm 6:1; Psalm 6:8; Psalm 10:17; Psalm 41:9-11).

Written in the year 1593, the 17th of November, which is the Coronation Day of our sovereign Queen Elizabeth, whose reign God long continue. William Perkins.

CHAPTER 1: WHAT REPENTANCE IS



Repentance is a work of grace arising from a godly sorrow, by which a person turns from all his sins to God and produces fruit worthy of an amended life.

I call repentance a work because it appears to be not a quality, virtue, or habit, but an action performed by a repentant sinner. This is clear from the sermons of the prophets and apostles, which consistently say: repent, turn to God, amend your lives, and so on. By these words they show that repentance is a work to be done.

Repentance is not just any kind of work — it is a work of grace, because it can only be practiced by those who are in a state of grace. The reasons are these. First, no one can repent unless he first hates sin and loves righteousness. No one can hate sin unless he is sanctified. He who is sanctified is justified. And he who is justified must have the faith that unites him to Christ, making him bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh. Therefore, the one who repents is justified and sanctified, and made a member of Christ by faith. Second, he who turns to God must first be turned by God. After we are turned, then we repent. As Jeremiah says: 'Surely af-

ter I was converted I repented; and after I was instructed I struck upon my thigh; I was ashamed, indeed even confounded, because I bore the reproach of my youth' (Jeremiah 31:19).

Some may object that repentance precedes all other grace, since it is what is first preached. The first sermon ever preached was on repentance, delivered by God Himself in paradise to our first parents. And ever since, the sermons of all the prophets, apostles, and faithful ministers have had repentance as their starting point and goal. The answer is this. If we consider the order of nature, certain other graces of God come before repentance, because a person's conscience must be at least partly settled regarding his reconciliation with God in Christ before he can begin to repent. Therefore, justification and sanctification precede repentance in the order of nature. But if we consider time, grace and repentance come together at once. Just as fire is hot the moment it exists, so the moment a person is regenerate, he repents. If we consider the outward appearance of these two, repentance comes before all other graces, because it shows itself outwardly first. Regeneration is like the sap of a tree hidden beneath the bark. Repentance is like the bud that quickly appears before blossom, leaf, or fruit — indeed, all the other saving graces of the heart are made visible through repentance. For this reason, I believe repentance is what is preached first.

I add further that repentance arises from a godly sorrow in the heart, as Paul teaches. Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, a repentance that is never regretted. It is called godly sorrow, or sorrow according to God, to distinguish it from worldly sorrow — which is grief arising from awareness of God's wrath and other miseries such as fear of people, loss of reputation, or calami-

ties in goods and other things that follow as punishments for sin in this life. Godly sorrow, by contrast, grieves over sin because sin is sin. It produces in the person who has it this disposition: even if there were no conscience to accuse, no devil to terrify, no judge to arraign and condemn, no hell to torment — he would still be humbled and brought to his knees for his sins, because he has offended a loving, merciful, and patient God (2 Corinthians 7:10).

I also say that repentance means turning again to God. At first, man was made a glorious creature in the image of God, enjoying fellowship with Him — dwelling in God and God in him. Sin created a wall between God and man. Man became alienated and estranged from God, and became a child of wrath, a firebrand of hell — the prodigal son going from his father into a far country, the straying and lost sheep. When people receive grace to repent, they begin to renew that fellowship and turn back to God. The very essence of repentance consists in this turning. Paul seems to indicate this when he says that he declared to both Jews and Gentiles that they should repent, turn to God, and do works worthy of an amended life. In those words he gives us a full description of repentance (Isaiah 59:2; Ephesians 4:18; Acts 26:20).

I also say that repentance is a turning from sin — not in the sense that it abolishes or changes the substance of body or soul, or any of their faculties in whole or in part, but rather that it corrects and amends them by removing the corruption. It turns the sadness of melancholy into godly sorrow, irritability into righteous zeal, softness of temperament into gentleness of spirit, and restlessness and frivolity into Christian joy. It reforms every person according to their natural constitution — not abolishing it, but correcting its faults.

I further specify that repentance is a turning from all sin to God, in order to exclude many false kinds of turning. The first false turning is when a person turns from God to sin — as when a Protestant becomes a Catholic, an Arian, or a Familist. The second is when a person turns from one sin to another — as when someone who has been wasteful gives up extravagance and takes up greed instead. This cannot be repentance, because repentance means leaving the extremes and holding to the middle ground. The third is not when a man turns from sin, but when sin turns from him and departs on its own — as when a drunkard gives up drinking because his stomach has given out, a fornicator gives up immorality because his strength has failed, or a brawler stops fighting because he has been crippled. The last false turning is when someone turns from many sins but refuses to turn from all of them — as Herod did many things at John the Baptist's urging, but could not be brought to give up the incest of living with his brother Philip's wife. This kind of repentance is worthless. For just as the truly regenerate person is wholly regenerate — in body, soul, and spirit — so the one who truly repents turns from all sin and turns wholly to God.

This should not trouble anyone who cannot know all their sins — for sound repentance for one particular sin carries with it repentance for all sin. And just as God requires particular repentance for known sins, He accepts a general repentance for those that are unknown.

To go further, the conversion of a sinner in repentance has three parts. The first is a purpose and resolve in the mind. The second is an inclination in the will and affections. The third is an ef-

fort in daily life and conduct to abandon all former sins and give oneself to obedience to God's commandments.

Finally, this repentance must bring forth fruit worthy of an amended life, because it cannot be known to be sincere unless it produces fruit. Repentant sinners are trees of righteousness planted by God Himself, growing beside the waters that flow from the sanctuary — and therefore they must bear fruit that serves as food, and leaves that serve as medicine. Otherwise the axe of God's judgment is laid to their roots to cut them down (Isaiah 61:3; Ezekiel 47:12; Matthew 3:10).

CHAPTER 2: OF THE CAUSES OF REPENTANCE



The principal cause of repentance is the Spirit of God, as Paul says — instructing in meekness those who oppose the truth, in the hope that God may grant them repentance. And Jeremiah says: 'Turn me, and I shall be turned' (2 Timothy 2:25; Jeremiah 31:18).

The instrument the Holy Spirit uses to work repentance is the ministry of the Gospel alone — not the law. The reasons are these. First, faith is produced by the preaching of the Gospel, not the law. As Paul says, the gospel is the power of God for salvation to all who believe, from faith to faith. Therefore repentance, which follows faith as one of its fruits, must come through the preaching of the gospel alone. Second, the law is the ministry of death and condemnation, because it shows a person his wretched condition but offers no remedy. Therefore it cannot be an instrument that produces the kind of repentance that leads to salvation. Third, the doctrine of repentance is part of the gospel — which is evident from the fact that preaching repentance and preaching the gospel are used interchangeably. Our Savior Christ divides the gospel into two parts: the preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins in His

name. Fourth, the part of God's word that works repentance must reveal the nature of repentance and set out the promise of life that belongs to it. But the law reveals neither faith nor repentance — that is the proper work of the gospel. If someone says that the law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, the answer is: it brings people to Christ not by teaching the way or by drawing them gently, but by forcing and compelling them (Romans 1:18; 2 Corinthians 3:7; Luke 9:6; Mark 6:12; Luke 24:47).

We are not abolishing the law by saying repentance belongs to the gospel alone. For though the law is not the cause of repentance, it is an occasion for it. The law sets before the soul our damnable condition and strikes the conscience with deep terror and fear. These terrors are not in themselves signs of grace — in their own nature they are the very gates and path leading down to the pit of hell — yet they are certain occasions through which grace is received. A physician is sometimes forced to restore a patient's health by inducing a fever. In the same way, because man is deathly sick with the disease of sin, he must be cast into fits of legal terror through the ministry of the law, so that he may recover and come to eternal life.

Repentance is also helped along by calamities. Joseph's brothers, when they were in distress in Egypt, said to one another: 'We have truly sinned against our brother — we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not listen. That is why this trouble has come upon us.' The Lord says in Hosea: 'I will go and return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.' And the Israelites say: 'My soul has these afflictions in remembrance, and is humbled within me.' Consider the example of Manasseh: when

he was in distress he prayed to the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly. And David says: 'It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn Your statutes' (Genesis 42:21; Hosea 5:15; Lamentations 3:20; 2 Chronicles 33:12; Psalm 119:71).

CHAPTER 3: OF THE PARTS OF REPENTANCE



Repentance has two parts: mortification, and rising to newness of life.

Mortification is the first part of repentance, and it concerns turning from sin.

People turn from sin not only by refraining from actual sin, but also by using every means available to weaken and suppress the corruption of their nature. Surgeons, when they must cut off a part of the body, first apply poultices to deaden it, so that it can be removed with less pain. In the same way, we must use all the remedies prescribed in God's word that serve to weaken or kill sin, so that it may be fully abolished at death.

It should not seem strange that I say we must use means to mortify our own sins. Although by nature we cannot do anything acceptable to God, once we are quickened and moved by the Holy Spirit, we stir and move ourselves to do what is truly good. Therefore repentant sinners have grace within them by which they mortify their own sins. Paul says: 'I beat down my body and bring it into subjection.' And: 'Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.' And: 'Therefore put to

death your earthly members — sexual immorality, impurity, sinful passion, evil desire, and covetousness.' And: 'If anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor.' John says: 'Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.' And: 'He who is born of God keeps himself, and the evil one does not touch him' (1 Corinthians 9:27; Galatians 5:24; Colossians 3:5; 2 Timothy 2:21; 1 John 3:3; 1 John 5:18).

Mortification has three parts: a purpose in the mind, an inclination in the will, and an effort in daily life and conduct to leave all sin.

Rising to newness of life is the second part of repentance, and it concerns sincere obedience to God.

It also has three parts. The first two are a resolution in the mind and an inclination or desire in the will to obey God in all things. Barnabas urged the believers at Antioch to cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart. Scripture gives many examples of both these. Joshua said: 'If it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve — whether the gods your fathers served, or the gods of the Amorites — but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.' David said: 'O Lord, You are my portion; I have determined to keep Your commandments.' And: 'I have sworn, and I will keep it, that I will keep Your righteous judgments.' And: 'When You said, Seek My face, my heart answered, O Lord, I will seek Your face.' And: 'I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes forever, to the very end' (Acts 11:23; Joshua 24:15; Psalm 119:57; Psalm 119:106; Psalm 27:8; Psalm 119:112).

The third part is an effort in daily life and conduct to obey God. Paul is the example here.

He said: 'I do my best to maintain a clear conscience before both God and men.' And David said: 'I respect all Your commandments.' And: 'I have chosen the way of truth, and I have set Your judgments before me.' And: 'I have held fast to Your testimonies.' And: 'Direct me in the path of Your commandments, for in it I delight' (Acts 24:16; Psalm 119:6; Psalm 119:30; Psalm 119:31; Psalm 119:35).

No one should think that a repentant sinner perfectly fulfills the law in his obedience — their best works are still flawed before God. When believers in Scripture are said to be perfect, we must understand that there are two degrees of perfection: perfection in substance, and perfection in the highest degree. Perfection in substance is when a person sincerely endeavors to render perfect obedience to God — not in some commandments but in all of them. This is the only perfection available to anyone in this life. A Christian's perfection is to mourn his imperfection. His obedience consists more in the willingness than in the work, and is measured more by the affection than by the achievement.

CHAPTER 4: OF THE DEGREES OF REPENTANCE



Repentance has two degrees. It is either ordinary or extraordinary.

Ordinary repentance is what every Christian is to practice every day. Just as people fall more or less each day, so the graces of God are proportionally weakened day by day. These graces must be continually renewed through a daily practice of repentance. A Christian is the temple and house of God's Spirit, and therefore must sweep it out once a day so that it may be a fitting place for so worthy a guest.

Extraordinary repentance is the same in nature as ordinary repentance; it differs only in the degree and measure of grace required.

This kind of repentance is called for when people fall into serious, grave, or grievous offenses — sins that deeply wound their own consciences and cause great offense to the church. Peter's repentance, when he went out and wept bitterly, was of this kind. So was David's repentance after he had committed adultery and murdered Uriah.

CHAPTER 5: OF THE PERSONS WHICH MUST REPENT



There are two kinds of people: the unregenerate and the regenerate. Repentance is necessary for both. For the unregenerate, so that they may be brought out of their sins and the image of God renewed in them. Some may say that many unregenerate people live decently, keeping away from outrageous behavior, and therefore have no need of repentance. I grant that they do. Yet repentance must still accompany this. A decent life without grace in Christ is nothing but a beautiful abomination in God's sight. The Pharisees were decent people, yet Christ said of them: 'Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.' Repentance is also required of the regenerate, because they carry many known and secret corruptions within them that must be mortified. They sometimes fall seriously, and therefore, in order to rise again, they must be daily practiced in the spiritual exercises of repentance.

CHAPTER 6: OF THE PRACTICE OF REPENTANCE



In the practice of repentance, four special duties are required. The first is a careful and serious examination of the conscience by the laws and commandments of God — covering all manner of sins, both original and actual. The Israelites give us an example: 'Why should any living person complain? A man suffers for his sins. Let us examine and test our ways, and return to the Lord.' David says: 'I considered my ways and turned my feet to Your testimonies' (Lamentations 3:39-40; Psalm 119:59).

Regarding original sin, this must be clearly understood: no one person has only one part of original sin while another person has a different part. It is not that one man has this corruption and another man that. Rather, just as every person received from Adam the whole of human nature, so every person received the whole of original sin. Therefore every person — without exception, apart from Christ, who was extraordinarily sanctified by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin — carries from his parents the corruption and seed of every sin. This is a natural disposition and tendency to commit any sin whatsoever. Consider all the horrible sins practiced anywhere in the world, whether against the first or sec-

ond table of the law. Whatever they are, the seed and source of them all is present even in the person considered to be the most naturally well-disposed. Some may say that experience shows otherwise, since among people who have no religion at all, some are more orderly and decent while others are more corrupt. My answer is that this is not because some people are by nature less wicked than others, but because God in His providence restrains the corruption of people to greater or lesser degrees — which He does for the good of humanity. If people were left entirely to themselves, corruption would break out so completely into every kind of sin that life in the world would become impossible.

Regarding actual sins, they will be found through examination to be countless as the hairs of a man's head and as the grains of sand on the seashore — if anyone will search themselves even briefly against the Ten Commandments, examining all their sinful thoughts, words, and deeds against God and man.

A guide for examining the conscience. 1st Commandment: You shall have no other gods, etc. A person breaks this commandment: who does not know the true God (Jeremiah 4:22); who denies God in his heart by denying His presence, justice, or mercy, etc. (Psalm 14:1); who hates God and shows it through disobedience (Exodus 20:5; Romans 1:30); who does not fear God and stand in awe of Him; who fears people or other created things more than God (Matthew 10:31; Revelation 21:8); who lives in open sin without care, not fearing God's word or His judgments (1 Thessalonians 5:6-7); who grieves over his sins only out of fear of punishment (2 Corinthians 7:10); who fears God merely out of human tradition (Isaiah 29:13); who does not believe God's word but calls the canonical scripture into question; who despairs of God's mercy;

who has a dead faith without works (James 2); who trusts in the devil and his works, as those who consult with wizards do; who loves created things — such as riches and honor — and his own sinful pleasures more than God (Ephesians 5:5); who puts confidence in his own strength, wisdom, wealth, or physicians (2 Chronicles 16:9-11); who is impatient under trials (Matthew 10:38); who tests God (Matthew 4:7); who seeks the things of this life more than God's kingdom (Matthew 6:33); who murmurs against God (1 Corinthians 10:10); who argues and maintains that there is no God; who holds and defends opinions contrary to the ancient faith set down in the writings of the prophets and apostles, as did the Manichees, Donatists, Arians, and Anabaptists; who holds one religion while remaining ready to adopt another (1 Kings 18:21); who is full of presumption about God's mercy (Isaiah 7:12); who falls away from known truth (2 Peter 2:20); who adds to canonical scripture (Deuteronomy 12, last verse). 2nd Commandment: You shall not make for yourself any carved image, etc. A person breaks this commandment: who represents God in an image (Exodus 32:6-8); who worships God at or through images, such as crucifixes and the like (2 Kings 18:4); who kneels before an image; who attends Mass while keeping his heart privately to God (1 Corinthians 8:9); who keeps monuments of idolatry (Exodus 23:13); who marries unbelievers or the like (Genesis 6:2); who makes close alliances with such people (2 Chronicles 19:1); who worships God according to his own imagination (Colossians 2:23); who worships God with lip-service only (Isaiah 29:13); who has the form of godliness but denies its power (2 Timothy 3:5); who gives God's worship to created things — such as saints and angels (Psalm 115:8); who refuses to hear the preaching of the Gospel

(Luke 14:19); who worships God carelessly (Revelation 3:16); who neglects to call on God's name (Isaiah 64:7); who hears sermons but when rebuked, rages and gains nothing (Amos 5:10); who changes the worship of God in whole or in part (Deuteronomy 12:32); who makes any open or secret agreement with the devil (Psalm 58); who practices witchcraft, sorcery, or enchantments (Deuteronomy 18:11; Leviticus 19:26); who consults wizards (Leviticus 20:6); who wears charms or amulets and puts confidence in them; who hinders schools of religion and sound learning; who does not seek — within his sphere of responsibility — the welfare of God's church, but pursues only his own interests (Psalm 132:3-4). 3rd Commandment: You shall not take the name of the Lord, etc. A person breaks this commandment: who uses God's titles carelessly in conversation (Philippians 2:10); who swears to do something lawful and good, yet fails to do it (Matthew 5:23); who swears rashly (Jeremiah 4:2); who swears out of habit in everyday speech (Matthew 5:37); who blasphemes the name of God (Leviticus 24:16); who swears falsely (John 8:44); who swears against piety and decency; who uses cursing and profanity; who finds fault with God's creation (1 Corinthians 10:3); who swears by created things (Matthew 5:34-35); who uses lots for sport (Proverbs 16:33; Proverbs 18:18); who makes and uses charms from herbs or other things (Deuteronomy 18:11); who makes jokes using sentences or phrases from Scripture (Isaiah 66:2); who practices astrology (Isaiah 47:13); who treats God's judgments lightly (Hebrews 3:16); who lives carelessly in religion and causes God's name to be spoken of poorly (2 Samuel 12:13; 1 Peter 3:15); who makes a vow of chastity or of anything beyond his power to keep; who makes a lawful vow and does not keep it (Deuteronomy

23:21); who receives God's blessings without thankfulness (Luke 17:8); who teaches the truth but does not practice it (Matthew 23:2). 4th Commandment: Remember the Sabbath day, etc. A person breaks this commandment: who does regular working tasks on the Sabbath (Nehemiah 13:15); who travels for ordinary business purposes (Exodus 16:24); who holds fairs and markets on this day (Nehemiah 13:15); who does harvest work on this day (Exodus 34:21); who engages in sports and recreations that distract from worship (1 Corinthians 10:7); who spends the day in idleness (Isaiah 58:13); who keeps the Sabbath only outwardly (Isaiah 1:13); who profanes it through gluttony and drunkenness; who gives servants free rein to do whatever they please; who does not bring his family to the congregation to hear God's word and receive the sacraments; who does not observe the Sabbath privately with his family. 5th Commandment: Honor your father, etc. A person breaks this commandment: who mocks, abuses, or strikes his superiors (Genesis 9:22); who disobeys their lawful commands (Romans 13:30); who is ungrateful to parents and will not care for them in need (2 Timothy 3:3); who disobeys God in order to obey them (Acts 4:19); who exalts himself above the governing authorities (2 Thessalonians 2:9); who serves his master only when being watched (Colossians 3:22); who governs his family and those under his authority carelessly (1 Timothy 3:4); who is slow to correct faults (1 Samuel 2:22); who is too harsh in words and punishment (Ephesians 6:9); who marries without parents' consent; who chooses his calling without parents' consent (Numbers 30); who thinks better of himself than of others (Romans 12:10); who despises the elderly (Leviticus 19:23). 6th Commandment: You shall not murder. A person breaks this commandment: who bears mal-

ice toward another (1 John 3:15); who is given to anger (Matthew 5:22); who harbors inward resentment and bitterness (James 3:14); who is difficult by nature, hard to please (Romans 1:31); who is full of rancor and bitterness (Ephesians 4:31); who mocks and scorns others (Genesis 21:9; Galatians 4:29); who uses harsh words and insults (Proverbs 12:18); who quarrels in words or deeds (Galatians 5:20); who argues and shouts (Ephesians 4:31); who constantly complains about his neighbor everywhere (James 5:9); who gets into fights (James 4:1); who hurts or injures his neighbor's body (Exodus 21:24); who refuses to forgive an offense (Matthew 5:23); who forgives but refuses to forget; who lives comfortably but gives nothing to relieve the poor (Luke 16:19); who is cruel in punishing wrongdoers (Deuteronomy 22:6); who withholds wages from servants or laborers (James 5:4); who holds back a pledged item (Ezekiel 18:7); who uses dishonest weights and measures; who moves property boundaries (Proverbs 22:18); who lends his goods for profit under binding terms that require repayment of both principal and interest (Ezekiel 18:8); whose loose living leads others into sin; who stirs up conflict and argument (Romans 1:29); who as a minister teaches erroneously; who teaches carelessly (Jeremiah 48:10); who does not teach at all (1 Timothy 3:2); who hinders people's salvation in any way (Matthew 23:13); who takes private revenge. 7th Commandment: You shall not commit adultery, etc. A person breaks this commandment: who looks at a woman with lust (Matthew 5:28); who commits incest (Leviticus 18:22); who commits sodomy (1 Corinthians 6:9); who commits fornication with married, single, or engaged persons (Deuteronomy 22:22); who uses the marriage bed immoderately; who lies with a woman during her menstrual period (Ezekiel 18:6);

who acts in a sensual manner (1 Corinthians 6:9); who creates occasions and provocations to lust (Galatians 5:9); who is given to idleness; who wears immodest or seductive clothing (1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3); who engages in inappropriate conversation or reads sensual books (1 Corinthians 15:35); who frequents places of moral looseness (Ephesians 5:3); who delights in immodest pictures (1 Thessalonians 5:23); who participates in mixed dancing of men and women (Mark 6:22); who keeps company with immoral or suspect persons (Proverbs 7:22); who neglects to arrange marriage for his children at a fitting time (1 Corinthians 7:37); who arranges marriages for young children; who punishes adultery with only light penalties; who takes more than one wife at a time (Genesis 2:24); who loves pleasure more than God (2 Timothy 3:4); who makes plans to satisfy the desires of the flesh (Romans 13:14); who supports and frequents brothels (Deuteronomy 23:17); who is given to drunkenness and overindulgence (Ephesians 5:18); who gives himself to wine, sleep, and idleness (Proverbs 20:13); who fails to marry to avoid fornication (1 Corinthians 7:2); who divorces his wife for reasons other than sexual immorality (Matthew 19:9). 8th Commandment: You shall not steal. A person breaks this commandment: who has no occupation (1 Thessalonians 3:11); who neglects his occupation (Jeremiah 48:10); who wastes his wealth in excess and does not provide for his family (1 Timothy 5:8); who is not content with his situation but seeks to become rich (1 Timothy 6:10); who sells Church property or buys it (Malachi 3:8); who sells goods that promote idolatry or any other sin; who uses powdering, starching, puffing up, or shady display to make his goods look better than they are; who conceals defects in his goods; who uses false weights and measures (Leviticus 19:35); who

uses deceptive words in transactions (Proverbs 20:14); who charges more than the fair price for his goods (Matthew 7:12); who exploits tenants by raising their rents excessively (Habakkuk 2:11); who buys up large quantities of goods to control the market; who raises the price only because payment is deferred; who gives or takes bribes (Isaiah 1:23; Psalm 82); who writes letters of bias in dishonest cases; who keeps borrowed things (Ezekiel 18:7); who keeps items that were found or were given as pledges (Leviticus 6:3); who is able-bodied yet lives by begging; who supports such people (2 Thessalonians 3:10); who defends bad causes for financial gain; who lays excessive burdens on the people (Isaiah 1:23; Ezekiel 22:27); who squanders church funds in excess (1 Timothy 6:9); who turns God's word and sacraments into a business (Micah 3:11; 2 Corinthians 2, last verse); who gains goods through gambling; who earns his living by casting horoscopes or performing in plays (Ephesians 4:28); who rashly stands as a guarantor for others (Proverbs 11:15; Proverbs 17:18); who abducts people's children to arrange their marriages (1 Timothy 1:10); who steals even the smallest thing, even for the best of reasons; who receives stolen goods and approves of the theft in any way (Romans 1:29); who uses deception in making deals (1 Thessalonians 4:6); who does not restore goods wrongfully taken (Ezekiel 33:15); who withholds goods pledged to the church (Acts 5:3); who waits for a shortage to sell his goods at a higher price (Amos 8:5). 9th Commandment: You shall not bear false witness, etc. A person breaks this commandment: who envies his neighbor's prosperity (1 Timothy 6:4); who seeks only his own good reputation; who is suspicious of others (1 Corinthians 13:5); who makes rash or harsh judgments about others (Matthew 7:1); who takes people's words and actions

in the worst possible way (Matthew 26:60); who makes false accusations (1 Kings 21); who spreads gossip, whether openly or privately (Leviticus 19:16); who listens to and passes on gossip (Exodus 23:1); who tells the truth out of malice (Psalm 52:1-2); who broadcasts people's faults and failures (Matthew 18:17); who uses mockery and taunting (Ephesians 5:4); who flatters others (Proverbs 26:19); who lies, even for a supposedly good reason (Zechariah 13:3); who defends an evil cause and attacks what is right; who writes or spreads slanderous material. 10th Commandment: You shall not covet. A person breaks this commandment: who entertains an evil thought against his neighbor, even without intending to act on it; who takes some inward pleasure in an evil impulse, even though he does not consent to carry it out. Sins directly against the Gospel. A person sins against the Gospel: who denies, either directly or by implication, that Christ has come in the flesh (1 John 4:3-8); who tramples underfoot the blood of Christ (Hebrews 10:29); who does not believe in the forgiveness of his own sins and his acceptance into eternal life (1 John 3:23); who does not repent but hardens himself in all his wicked ways (Romans 2:4-5; Jeremiah 8:6).

That covers the matter of examination. The second duty follows, which is the confession of sin to God — a very necessary practice. For the right way to have our sins covered before God is to uncover and acknowledge them to Him. He will justify us if we condemn ourselves. He will pardon us if, acting as our own accusers, we accuse ourselves before Him. He forgets our sins when we remember them. When we are vile in our own eyes, we are precious in His. And when we are lost to ourselves, we are found by Him.

For confession to be properly made, a notable practice must be carried out — the self-arraignment of a repentant sinner, by which he judges himself so that he will not be judged by the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:31).

This self-arraignment has three distinct steps. First, the person must bring himself before the bar of God's judgment. He does this by placing himself consciously in God's presence, as though the day of judgment were happening right now. Jerome did this — he always pictured himself hearing a voice sounding in his ear: 'Rise, you dead, and come to judgment.'

Second, he must draw up an indictment against himself — accusing himself before God, acknowledging his known sins specifically and his unknown sins generally, without any excuse, softening, defense, or concealment of even the least of them. David is the example: 'I acknowledge my iniquity, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, against You only have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight.' 'Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.' And: 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have acted very foolishly.' And Ezra: 'O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen above our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens' (Psalm 51:3-5; 1 Chronicles 21:8; Ezra 9:6).

Third, he must with a heavy heart pass sentence against himself, acknowledging that he is deserving of everlasting hell, death, and condemnation. As the prodigal son said: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' And Daniel said: 'We have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled; we have departed

from Your precepts and Your judgments.' 'To You, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame.' Job said: 'Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I will lay my hand on my mouth.' And: 'I despise myself, and I repent in dust and ashes.' And the tax collector: 'He stood far off and would not even lift his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner' (Daniel 9:7; Job 39:36; Job 42:6; Luke 18:13).

As for confession of sin to other people, it should only be practiced in two cases. First, when an offense has been committed against a neighbor. Second, when someone is seeking comfort and relief in a troubled conscience (Matthew 5; James 5:16).

The third duty in the practice of repentance is prayer for pardon — asking God to forgive the sins that have been confessed with a broken heart, praying with earnestness and persistence, as though one's life depended on it. We must come before God like the poor prisoner at the bar who, when the judge is about to pronounce sentence, cries out to him for mercy as though pleading for his very life. We must do as the cripple or beggar on the road — sit down, expose the wounds of our sins, and cry out continually to God, as beggars do to passersby: 'Look with your eye and take pity with your heart,' so that we may find mercy from God as beggars receive alms. This is how Hosea instructs the people: 'O Israel, return to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take words with you and return to the Lord; say to Him, take away all iniquity and receive us graciously, so we will offer the fruit of our lips.' Daniel prays: 'We are not presenting our supplications before You on account of our own righteousness, but on account of Your great compassion. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen and take action. Do not delay, for Your own sake, O my

God.' And David: 'Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions' (Hosea 14:2; Daniel 9:18-19; Psalm 51:1).

The final duty is to pray to God for grace and strength so that we may be enabled to walk in newness of life. David says: 'Behold, I long for Your precepts; revive me through Your righteousness.' And: 'Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground' (Psalm 119:40; Psalm 143:10).

CHAPTER 7: OF LEGAL MOTIVES TO REPENTANCE



Motives to repentance are either legal or evangelical. Legal motives are drawn from the law, and there are three main ones.

The first is the misery and cursed condition of every unrepentant sinner in this life, on account of his sins.

That misery — to put it in terms anyone can understand — is sevenfold: first, within him; second, before him; third, behind him; fourth, on his right hand; fifth, on his left hand; sixth, over his head; seventh, under his feet.

The misery within him is twofold. The first is a guilty conscience, which is a kind of hell for the ungodly person. He is like a helpless prisoner, with the conscience acting as a jailer who follows him everywhere, watching and recording all his words and deeds. Conscience is like a record-keeper who sits always with pen in hand, writing down every act of wickedness for permanent memory. It is a small judge who sits in the very center of a person's heart, putting him on trial in this life for his sins, just as he will be tried at the last judgment. The pangs, terrors, and fears of all unrepentant persons are like flashes from the flames of hell fire. A

guilty conscience makes a person like someone lying on a bed too narrow, with a blanket too short — who desperately wants to sleep but cannot. When Belshazzar was in the middle of his feast and saw the handwriting on the wall, he was struck with great fear, so that his face changed and his knees knocked together (Isaiah 28:20; Daniel 5:6).

The second evil within a person is the terrible slavery and bondage under the power of Satan, the prince of darkness. His mind, will, and affections are so bound to the devil's will that he can do nothing but obey him and rebel against God. This is why Satan is called the prince of this world — he holds the heart as an armed captain holds a fort or a castle under guard (2 Corinthians 4).

The misery before the sinner is a dangerous trap that the devil sets for the destruction of the soul. It is dangerous because he may set it twenty or forty years in advance and spring it when — God knows — people least expect it. This trap is made of three cords. With the first, the devil draws people in by concealing the misery and poison of sin and painting before the mind's eye its deceitful profits and pleasures. With the second, he ensnares them — for once a person is drawn into a particular sin, the devil has so sweetened it that he cannot help but stay in it. With the third, he pulls the trap shut and works with all his might to break the neck of the soul. When he sees a fitting opportunity — especially in times of great calamity or at the hour of death — he tears away the mask from sin and shows its true face, as ugly as himself. Then he begins to show his true nature, raging in terror and accusation, so that the soul of the person may be swallowed up in final despair (2 Timothy 2:25).

The misery behind the sinner is his past sins. The Lord said to Cain: 'If you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door.' Here sin is compared to a wild beast that follows a person wherever he goes and lurks at his heels. Though it may seem harmless for a time because it lies dormant, it will eventually — unless the person repents — rise up, seize him, and rip out the very throat of his soul. Job in his affliction said: 'You write bitter things against me and make me inherit the iniquities of my youth.' And David prays: 'Do not remember the sins of my youth.' If the memory of past sins is a trouble to a godly person, what a rack, what a torment will it be to the heart of one who lacks grace (Genesis 4:7; Job 13:26; Psalm 25:7)?

The misery on the right hand is prosperity and ease, which — because of human sinfulness — becomes an occasion for many judgments. In prosperity, people practiced the horrible sins of Sodom. It puffs up the heart with devilish pride, so that people begin to think themselves as great as God — as Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus, Alexander, Herod, and Domitian did. Prosperity steals the heart away from God and quenches the sparks of grace. As the Lord complains about the Israelites: 'I spoke to you in your prosperity, but you said, I will not listen. This has been your way from your youth.' Prosperity is like the ivy that embraces a tree and winds all around it, yet draws out its sap and life. This is why many turn prosperity into the occasion of their own destruction. Solomon says: 'The prosperity of fools destroys them.' When the spleen swells, the rest of the body wastes away; and when the heart is puffed up with pride, the whole person is in danger of ruin. The sheep that grazes in the best pasture is the first to reach the slaughterhouse. And the ungodly person fattens him-

self with continual prosperity only to arrive more quickly at his own damnation (Ezekiel 16:49; Jeremiah 22:21; Proverbs 1:32; Romans 9:22).

The misery on the left hand is adversity, which includes all kinds of losses and calamities in goods, relationships, reputation, and more. Read about this at length in Deuteronomy 28.

The misery over his head is the wrath of God, expressed in all manner of judgments from heaven — and every unrepentant sinner stands in danger of this every hour. The danger is very great. Scripture says: 'It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' He has storehouses full of every kind of judgment, and they lie in wait for careless sinners so that they cannot escape. God's wrath is like a fire that destroys and consumes everything it touches. And because He is slow to anger, He is all the more terrible — like a person who holds back his hand for a time so that he can raise it higher and strike a deeper blow. When even the dumb creation melts like wax and vanishes at His presence in anger — as the great mountains and rocks do — frail human beings can never expect to stand. If the roar of a lion makes people afraid and the voice of thunder is terrifying, how much more should all be shaken by the threatenings of God (Hebrews 10:31; Deuteronomy 32:34; Ezekiel 7:6; Nahum 1:4-6; Psalm 97).

The misery under his feet is hell fire — for every person until he repents is in as much danger of damnation as a convicted traitor is of execution. Picture a man walking along a path who falls into a deep pit full of horrible serpents and foul creatures. In his fall, he grabs hold of a small branch of a tree growing at the edge of the pit and hangs there by it. Then a gaunt and starving beast comes along, and having already eaten the whole tree, gnaws

constantly at the branch he is hanging from. What is the danger of this man? He is about to fall into the pit below him. This man is every unrepentant sinner; the pit is hell, prepared for the devil and his angels; the branch is the fragile and fleeting life of man; the starving beast is death, which is ready at any moment to cut our life away. The danger is fearful — for the person hanging over the mouth of hell, when life ends, will fall to its very bottom unless he uses the right means before he dies.

If this is the misery that surrounds and besieges the careless person on every side — and all because of his sins — why do people remain in the dead sleep of carelessness? They must take up bitter lamentation and howl for their offenses like those in great distress. If people could weep nothing but tears of blood for their sins, if they could die a thousand times a day from sheer grief, they could still never grieve enough for what they have done.

The second motive to draw people to repentance is the consideration of the wretched condition of the unrepentant sinner at the moment of death. Death is nothing but the wages and payment he receives for his sin, and it is the very gateway — or rather the entrance — into hell. Paul compares death to a scorpion that carries a sting in its tail, which is sin. When unrepentant and godless people die, this scorpion grips them in its claws and stabs them at the heart with its sting. The best course of action, therefore, is to use the right means to remove the sting of death before it strikes. And nothing will remove it but the blood of Christ. Let people therefore break off their sins through repentance. Let them come to the throne of grace and cry out — let them fill heaven and earth with their cries for mercy. Pray, pray, pray for the forgiveness of your sins. If you receive even one drop of God's special mercy in Christ,

all danger is past. For death has lost its sting, and then a person can hold even a poisonous serpent without danger (Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:55-56).

The third motive is the consideration of what lies beyond death. When the day of the last judgment comes, every person must be brought and stand before the judgment seat of Christ. There will be no escaping or hiding. Then the books will be opened and all sins will be exposed before God's saints and angels. The devil and the person's own conscience will accuse him. No one will serve as an advocate to plead his case. He himself will be speechless. At last he will hear the dreadful sentence of condemnation: 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' This alone should move the vilest atheist in the world to leave his wicked ways and come to amendment of life. We see that even the hardest thief, when he is being led from the prison to stand trial, stops his thieving and behaves himself properly. And indeed, if he were to pick a pocket on the way to the gallows, it would only prove he deserves to hang. By nature, all people are traitors and lawbreakers against God. While we live in this world, we are on the road to God's judgment. The wheel of the heavens turns one revolution every day and winds up a portion of the thread of our life. Whether we sleep or wake, we are always drawing nearer to our end. Therefore let all people daily humble themselves for their sins, pray that God would be reconciled to them in Christ, and earnestly seek to obey all God's commandments in both their private lives and their public responsibilities.

After the last judgment, there remains eternal death for the unrepentant — and it consists of three things. First, separation from all joy and comfort in God's presence. Second, eternal companion-

ship with the devil and all his angels. Third, the felt experience of the terrible wrath of God, which will seize upon body, soul, and conscience, feeding on them as fire feeds on pitch and brimstone, and tormenting them as a worm crawling through the body and gnawing on the heart. They will always be dying and never dead, always in anguish and never at rest. This death is all the more grievous because it is everlasting. Imagine the whole world as a mountain of sand, and that a bird carries away one mouthful of sand every thousand years. Many countless thousands of years would pass before it had carried away the whole mountain. If a person's torment were to last that long and then end, there would be some comfort in that. But when the bird had carried away the mountain a thousand times over — still, the person would be no closer to the end of his anguish than when he first began. This truth should serve as a sharp spur to drive people from their wicked lives. Chrysostom wanted people at their gatherings in taverns and feasts to talk about hell, so that by thinking of it often they might avoid it. A virtuous and chaste woman, when urged to commit immorality by a wicked man, listened to his long speeches and then called for a pan of burning coals. She asked him to hold his finger in them for just one hour, for her sake. He said that was an unreasonable request. She replied that since he would not hold even one finger in a few coals for a single small hour, she would not do the thing he asked — for which she would be tormented in both body and soul in hell fire forever. All people should reason the same way. No one is willing to do something that would cause even a finger or a tooth to ache. So we ought to take great care to leave our sins, by which we bring endless torment to body and soul in hell.

CHAPTER 8: OF EVANGELICAL MOTIVES



There are two main evangelical motives. The first comes from considering mankind's redemption. The one who redeemed mankind is God Himself. As Paul says, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Human sin is so vile and offensive in God's eyes that no angel or any created being was able to satisfy His wrath for even the smallest offense. The Son of God Himself had to come down from heaven, take on human nature, and not only that — He also had to suffer the most accursed death of the cross and shed His precious heart's blood to satisfy the justice of His Father on our behalf. If a father were sick with a disease that could only be cured by his own child's lifeblood, he would immediately recognize how desperate his condition was, and would also vow — if he recovered — to do everything possible to avoid that disease. In the same way, since nothing could heal the deadly wound of our sin except a remedy made from the blood of Christ's heart, this should make us acknowledge the pitiful nature of our condition and the gravity of even our smallest sins, and stir us up to newness of life (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Consider further that the purpose of the redemption Christ accomplished was to deliver us from our sinful and unrighteous way of life. We should not, therefore, continue to wallow in sin — for that would be like a prisoner who, after being ransomed, having his chains removed, and being released to go wherever he wished, turned around and asked to go back to his dungeon cell.

The second motive is that God has made promises to those who truly repent. First, a promise of forgiveness of sins: 'Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil — though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.' And: 'Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous person his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him, for He will abundantly pardon.' Second, a promise of eternal life: 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live.' And: 'Thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, seek Me that you may live.' Third, a promise to reduce or remove earthly calamities: 'Stand in the court of the Lord's house and speak to all the cities of Judah — perhaps they will listen and everyone will turn from his evil way, so that I may relent concerning the calamity which I am planning to bring on them because of the evil of their deeds' (Isaiah 1:16-18; Isaiah 55:6-7; Ezekiel 18; Amos 5:4; Jeremiah 26:3).

Just as God has made these merciful promises to repentant sinners, He has faithfully fulfilled them the moment they began to repent. The example of David: 'Then David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said to David, your sin is for-

given.' The example of Manasseh: when he was in distress, he prayed to the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before Him, and God was moved by his prayer and heard him. The example of the tax collector: he beat his breast and said, 'O God, be merciful to me, the sinner.' Jesus said: 'This man went to his house justified rather than the other.' The example of the thief on the cross: he said to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when You come in Your kingdom.' Jesus replied: 'Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in paradise' (2 Samuel 12:12; 2 Chronicles 33:12; Luke 18:13; Luke 23:42-43).

Given these remarkable promises made to repentance, no one should hold back from practicing it because of the number of their sins — that is all the more reason to repent. The Pharisee said to Christ's disciples: 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When Jesus heard it, He said: 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.' 'I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' And: 'Truly I say to you that tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the kingdom of God before you' (Matthew 9:12; Matthew 21:31).

CHAPTER 9: OF THE TIME OF REPENTANCE



The time for repentance is now — without any delay — as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you hear His voice.' And: 'Encourage one another every day, as long as it is called today, so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.' The reasons are these. First, life is uncertain. No one knows at what hour or moment, or in what manner, he will leave this world. 'Be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.' This alone should make a person hasten his repentance — all the more because many people who intended to repent at a later time have been prevented by death and will never repent. Second, the longer a person lives in any sin, the greater the danger, because through habit sin gains strength. Custom is so powerful that what people do throughout their lives, they say and do even as they are dying. One man had three pounds owed to him to be paid over three separate years. When he was on his deathbed, nothing could be gotten from him but 'three years, three pounds.' Beyond this, by deferring repentance, people store up wrath against the day of wrath — like a criminal sentenced to carry a stick of wood every day to a pile meant to burn him twenty years later. Third, the longer repentance is put off, the harder it becomes. The longer a

person is sick without receiving medicine, the harder the recovery. And where the devil has lived long, he will not be easily driven out. The best way to kill a serpent is to crush it in the head while it is young. Fourth, it is as sweet as food and drink to the devil to watch people living in their sins and putting off repentance. On the other side, there is great joy among the angels of God in heaven when even one sinner repents. Fifth, late repentance is rarely, if ever, true repentance. If a person repents only when he is no longer able to sin as before — as when he is dying — then it is not he who has left sin, but sin that has left him. Therefore the repentance people prepare for themselves on their deathbeds is likely to die with them. And it is entirely just that a person should be despised by God in death who despised God in life. Chrysostom says that the wicked person receives this punishment: that in dying he forgets himself, just as when he was living he forgot God. Sixth, like Abel, we are to offer God the best of our flock. But those who defer repentance to the end do the opposite. Late repenters offer the flower of their youth to the devil, and bring the lame and broken sacrifice of old age to God (Hebrews 3:7-13; Luke 12:40).

CHAPTER 10: OF CERTAIN CASES IN REPENTANCE



1. CASE OF A REVOLT.

Can a person who has professed Christ and His religion, but afterward denied Christ and renounced the faith under persecution, still repent and be saved? Answer: it is a grievous situation, yet repentance afterward is possible. Manasseh fell into idolatry and witchcraft, yet was received back to mercy. So did Solomon — and there is no doubt he recovered and was received to eternal life. My reasoning is that God granted him the privilege of writing portions of Holy Scripture. Scripture was written not merely by people who were called men of God, but by those who were holy men of God. Peter denied Christ knowingly, against his own conscience, with cursing and swearing — yet he came to repentance afterward, as Christ's own words confirm: 'I have prayed for you, that your faith will not fail; and when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers' (2 Chronicles 33; 2 Peter 1; Luke 22:32).

Objection 1: Matthew 10:33 — 'Whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.' Answer: this passage must be understood only as referring to a de-

nial of Christ that is final.

Objection 2: Hebrews 6:4 — 'It is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, etc., if they fall away, to be renewed again to repentance.' And Hebrews 10:26 — 'If we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.' Answer: these passages must be understood as referring to the sin that leads to death — the sin in which people of deliberate malice toward Christ completely and finally abandon the faith. For the Holy Spirit does not say, 'if they fall,' but 'if they fall away.' It is further said of these people that they crucify the Son of God and mock Him, that they trample underfoot the Son of God, that they regard the blood of the new covenant as an unholy thing, and that they despise the Spirit of God. And the word translated 'willfully' means something stronger — it means sinning because a person chooses to — that is, defiantly and deliberately (Hebrews 6:6; Hebrews 10:29).

2. CASE OF RECIDIVATION.

Can a child of God, after repenting of a serious sin, fall into the same sin again and come to repentance a second time? Answer: the situation is dangerous, as we can see by analogy with the body. If someone relapses into a fever or other serious illness, it may cost him his life, and recovery will be very hard. Christ said to the man who had been sick for thirty-eight years, after healing him: 'You have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.' And the unclean spirit that returns brings with him seven other spirits worse than himself. It is true that we find no particular example in Scripture of recovery after a relapse. Yet a

recovery is certainly possible. The reasons are these. First, the promise of forgiveness of sins in Christ has no time limit. It is not restricted to any number or type of sin, except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Therefore repentance and salvation after a relapse are possible. Second, Christ told Peter that he must forgive not merely seven times — which Peter perhaps thought was already generous — but seventy-seven times, even in a single day, if someone returns seventy times and says 'I repent.' If we, who have not so much as a drop of mercy compared to God, are expected to forgive this way, how much more will God forgive us — even for the same sin — when we return and say 'I repent,' considering that with Him there is abundant redemption and He is greatly inclined to pardon (John 5:14; Luke 11:26; Acts 10:43; Luke 17:4; Psalm 130:7; Isaiah 56:7).

3. CASE OF RESTITUTION.

Is a person who repents required to make restitution if he has wrongfully taken something from his neighbor? Answer: yes. Zacchaeus, when he repented and received Christ, gave half of his goods to the poor, and where he had taken anything through fraud, he restored it fourfold. It is a poor practice when a person on his deathbed devoutly bequeaths his soul to God, while leaving goods that his own conscience tells him were unjustly obtained — to his children and friends — without either restoring them or making amends. Question: but what if a person cannot afford to restore what he took? Answer: let him acknowledge the fault, and God will accept the willing heart in place of the deed. As Paul says in a similar case: 'If the willingness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.'

Question: when restoring something would ruin a person's reputation, how can he both restore and preserve his good name? Answer: if the item to be restored is of small value, let him choose a trustworthy and honest friend who can return it on his behalf without revealing his name (Luke 19:8; 2 Corinthians 8:12).

4. CASE OF TEARS.

Does repentance always come with tears? Answer: no. Even pride and hypocrisy can produce tears — some people can weep for their sins in front of others while being unable to cry at all when alone. Some people are naturally disposed to cry easily. A godly person with dry cheeks may still mourn to God for his sins, seek pardon, and receive it. Yet in moments of deeper grief over sin, tears will follow — unless a person has a heart of stone. Even so, though great cause for sorrow may be present, the softest heart will not always cry immediately — but it will in time. When the body receives a deep wound, at first you may see nothing but a white mark in the flesh, with no blood. Wait a moment, and blood flows from the wound in great abundance. So at first the mind is stunned and produces no tears, but after a pause and reflection, tears follow.

5. CASE OF DEATH.

Can a repentant sinner always show comfort on his deathbed? Answer: although the comfort of God's Spirit will never be completely extinguished from his heart, he may not always be able to show it. He may die of a burning fever and, in the extremity of his symptoms, suffer delirious thoughts that break out in raving or even blasphemous speech. He may likewise die of a brain illness

with terrible convulsions, so that his mouth is pulled to one side, his neck twisted backward, and the very surface he lies on shakes from his trembling — as daily experience shows. No one should find this strange. For Solomon says: 'It is the same for all' — the same fate comes to the just and the wicked, to the good and to the sinful, to the clean and to the unclean, to the one who sacrifices and to the one who does not (Ecclesiastes 9:2).

CHAPTER 11: OF THE CONTRARIES TO REPENTANCE



The opposite of repentance is impenitence — when people remain in a fixed state, neither grieving over sin nor turning from it.

If it is final, impenitence is one of the most terrible judgments there is. Just as a sick person is most dangerously sick when he feels the least illness and thinks he is well, so a miserable person is in the deepest misery when he feels no misery and thinks his situation is fine.

This sin overtakes those who think themselves righteous and in no need of repentance. This was true of the Pharisees in the days of Christ, the Catharists in the early church, and the Anabaptists in our own age. Add to these those who have so hardened their hearts that they can no longer distinguish between good and evil, nor tremble at God's judgments — but instead rage against them, until God in His wrath either destroys them or casts them into final despair. This is what happened to Julian the Apostate, who died blaspheming and throwing his own blood into the air.

Between the two extremes of repentance and impenitence lies counterfeit repentance. The corrupt nature of man is capable of simulating and faking God's grace. As the Lord complains of the Jews: 'Her treacherous sister Judah did not return to Me with her whole heart, but only in pretense, declares the Lord' (Jeremiah 3:10).

Counterfeit repentance takes two forms: ceremonial and desperate.

Ceremonial repentance is when people repent outwardly but not in the truth of their hearts. Saul is an example: 'Then Saul said to Samuel, I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice. Now therefore please pardon my sin and return with me, that I may worship the Lord.' And again: 'I have sinned; but please honor me before the elders of my people.' Ahab is another example: 'When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about despondently. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah: Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me?' (1 Samuel 15:24-30; 1 Kings 21:27-29).

Fake repentance can be recognized because people eventually return to their old ways. Pharaoh, king of Egypt, said to Moses and Aaron: 'Pray to the Lord to take away the frogs from me and my people.' When Egypt was struck with hail, he said: 'I have sinned this time; the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked. Pray to the Lord that there be no more thunder and hail.' Then, when struck with locusts, he said: 'I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. Now please forgive my sin only this once.' Now notice what happened: 'But when Pharaoh saw that the

relief had come, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the Lord had said.' This is the common and ordinary repentance that most people practice in the world (Exodus 8:8; Exodus 9:27; Exodus 10:16; Exodus 8:15).

Desperate repentance is when a person, seeing only God's judgments and feeling the horror of a guilty conscience, reaches a point of despair without finding any assurance of God's mercy — and that despair becomes final. This was Judas's repentance: he returned the thirty pieces of silver, confessed his fault, went and hanged himself (Matthew 27:3).

CHAPTER 12: OF CORRUPTIONS IN THE DOCTRINE OF REPENTANCE



The Roman church today has corrupted the ancient doctrine of repentance, which is one of the most important points of the Christian faith. There are six main corruptions.

First, they make repentance — or penance — a sacrament, which it cannot be, because it lacks an outward visible sign. Some argue that the words the priest speaks in absolution serve as the sign, but that cannot be right, because a sacramental sign must be not only audible but also visible.

Second, they teach that a sinner has a natural capacity which, when stirred up by God's preparatory grace, allows him to cooperate with God's Spirit in his own repentance. But in truth, all our repentance must be attributed entirely to God's grace. The soul of man is not merely weakened but completely dead in sin, and therefore it can no more prepare itself for repentance than a body dead in the grave can prepare itself for the final resurrection (Ephesians 1).

Third, they teach that contrition in repentance must be sufficient. This is impossible. Sin offends God's majesty so greatly that no person can ever grieve enough for it.

Fourth, they teach that contrition earns the forgiveness of sin. This view greatly diminishes the all-sufficient merits of Christ.

Fifth, they teach that a penitent must confess every sin he can remember, with all its circumstances, to his own priest — or to a substitute — in order to receive pardon. This kind of confession is a pure human invention. First, there is neither command nor example for it anywhere in Scripture. Second, David and others have repented and received forgiveness of their sins without confessing them in detail to any person (Psalm 32:3; 2 Samuel 12:10).

Sixth, they teach that the sinner must make satisfaction to God through his own works and sufferings for the temporal punishment of his sins. This is outright blasphemy. Scripture speaks of no satisfaction but Christ's. If His is sufficient, ours is unnecessary. If ours were necessary, His would be incomplete. Roman Catholic writers say that both can stand together. Christ's satisfaction, they say, is like a healing remedy kept in a jar but not yet applied — and man's satisfaction is the means by which it is applied, because it prepares us to receive it. What a theology this is! Even by common sense, the satisfaction of Christ must first be applied to the person before any works — which they call satisfactions — can be in any way acceptable to God (1 John 1:7; 1 John 2:1).

In conclusion, the Roman doctrine of repentance is a direct road to hell. When a sinner is taught that he must achieve sufficient sorrow for his sin, and is also told that he must not believe in the personal forgiveness of his own sins in particular, then when real sorrow descends on him and he finds no solid comfort in God's mercy, he will inevitably fall into hopeless despair. This is

why Roman Catholics on their deathbeds — as we have seen — are glad to abandon the system of human satisfactions and rest entirely, for their justification, on the obedience of Christ.

THE COMBAT OF THE FLESH AND SPIRIT



Galatians 5:17. For the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you cannot do the things which you would.

The Apostle Paul, from the beginning of this chapter through verse 12, urges the Galatians to maintain their Christian freedom. From there to the end of the chapter he calls them to other specific duties of godliness. In verse 13 he stirs them up to serve one another in love. In verse 15 he warns them against quarreling and doing harm to one another. In verse 16 he shows the remedy for these sins — walk according to the spirit. In verse 17 he gives the reason for that remedy, and the argument is this: the flesh and the spirit are opposed to one another; therefore, if you walk according to the spirit, it will restrain the flesh from driving you toward injury and quarreling, which it would otherwise do.

In this verse there are five points to observe. The first is that there is a combat between the flesh and the spirit, as expressed in the words: 'the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.' The second is the nature of this combat, which consists in the opposing desires of the flesh and the spirit. The third is the

cause of the combat — expressed in the words: 'and these are contrary.' The fourth is who experiences this combat — indicated by the words: 'so that you,' meaning the Galatians. The fifth is the effect of the combat — in the final words, that they cannot do what they would.

Regarding the combat itself, several points need to be considered. The first is the identity of the two combatants — namely, the flesh and the spirit. Both terms have several different meanings. First, 'spirit' can mean the soul and 'flesh' can mean the body. But they are not used this way here, because there is no such combat between body and soul — both work together to make one person. Second, 'spirit' can mean natural reason and 'flesh' can mean natural appetite or desire. But they cannot be understood this way here, because the spirit described in this passage fights even against natural reason — which, though it leaves people without excuse, is still an enemy to the spirit. Third, 'spirit' can refer to Christ's divine nature and 'flesh' to His human nature. But it cannot mean that here — for then every regenerate person would be deified. Finally, 'spirit' refers to a created quality of holiness that the Holy Spirit works into the mind, will, and affections of a person; and 'flesh' refers to the natural corruption or inclination of the mind, will, and affections toward what is against the law. It is this last sense in which these two terms are used in this passage.

Second, we need to understand how these two — the flesh and the spirit — can fight together, since both are mere qualities. We must understand that they are not separated into different compartments — as though the flesh were located in one part of the soul and the spirit in another. Rather, they are joined and mingled throughout every faculty of the soul. The mind or understanding is

not part flesh and part spirit — the entire mind is both flesh and spirit at once, partly one and partly the other. The entire will is partly flesh and partly spirit — with grace and corruption not separated in location but distinguished in kind. Think of the air at dawn: it is neither entirely light as at noon nor entirely dark as at midnight, yet it is not light in one part and dark in another — the whole air is partly light and partly dark throughout. Or consider a container of lukewarm water: the water is neither entirely hot nor entirely cold, nor is one part hot and another cold — heat and cold are mixed together throughout every part. In the same way, flesh and spirit are mingled together throughout the soul of man, and this is why these two opposing qualities fight with each other.

Third, in this combat we need to consider the relative strength of the two opponents — the flesh and the spirit. We must understand that the flesh is generally greater in measure than the spirit. The flesh is like the mighty giant Goliath, and the spirit is small and weak like young David. This is why Paul calls the Corinthians — who were justified and sanctified men — carnal: 'I could not speak to you, brothers, as to spiritual people but as to fleshly people, as to infants in Christ.' And no one can become a mature adult in Christ according to the full measure of Christ until after this life. The saying used by some theologians — that the regenerate person has only the remnants of sin in him — must be understood with care, or it may lead to error. As for the measure of grace, it can only be small in proportion, since in this life we receive only the first fruits of the Spirit and must wait for the completion of our redemption in the life to come. Even so, the power of the spirit is great enough to ordinarily prevail against the flesh. For the flesh received its mortal wound at the first moment of a person's con-

version and continues to die little by little from that point on — so it fights like a wounded soldier. And the spirit is continually strengthened and increased by the Holy Spirit. It is also active and vigorous — its power is like musk, where a single grain gives a stronger scent than many ounces of other perfumes. Some may say that the godly person feels the flesh more strongly than the spirit, and therefore that the flesh is in every way stronger. My answer is that we must not measure our condition by feeling, which can easily mislead us. A person may feel a pain in the tip of a finger more acutely than the health of his whole body, yet the health of the body is greater than the pain of a finger. Furthermore, we feel our corruption not by the corruption itself but by grace — so the more a person feels his inner corruptions, the more grace he actually has (1 Corinthians 3:1; Ephesians 4; Romans 8:23).

That covers the combat itself. Now let us turn to the nature of this fight.

The fight is carried on through lusting. To lust in this passage means to bring forth and stir up impulses and inclinations in the heart, either toward good or evil.

Lusting is of two kinds: the lusting of the flesh and the lusting of the spirit.

The lusting of the flesh has two actions. The first is to generate evil impulses and desires — such as self-love, envy, pride, unbelief, anger, and so on. James says that people are enticed and drawn away by their own desires. This enticement consists entirely in the suggestion of sinful thoughts and cravings. It was this action of the flesh that made Paul say he was carnal, sold under sin (James 1:14; Romans 7:14).

The second action of the flesh is to hinder, quench, and overwhelm all the good impulses of the spirit. Paul experienced this when he said: 'I see a different law in my members, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin.' Because of this action of the flesh, the regenerate person is like someone in a disturbed sleep suffering from sleep paralysis — who feels as though something as heavy as a mountain is pressing on his chest and desperately wants it removed, so that he strains and struggles to push it away, but is completely unable to (Romans 7:23).

On the other side, the lusting of the spirit contains two opposing actions. The first is to produce good impulses, inclinations, and desires in the mind, will, and affections. David speaks of this: 'My conscience instructs me in the night.' That is, his mind, affections, will, and entire soul — being sanctified and guided by the Spirit of God — bring before him considerations about the path he should walk. Isaiah, prophesying of the church of the New Testament, says: 'Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a word behind you, saying, This is the way, walk in it.' This voice is not only the outward preaching of ministers but also the inward voice of the spirit (Psalm 16:8; Isaiah 30:22).

The second action of the spirit is to hinder and suppress the evil impulses and suggestions of the flesh. John says: 'Whoever is born of God does not practice sin, because His seed abides in him' — that is, the grace worked in the heart by the Holy Spirit resists the rebellious desires of the flesh (1 John 3:9).

To make the nature of this fight clearer, we need to examine it more specifically. The soul of man has two primary faculties: the mind and the will.

In the mind there is a double combat. The first is between knowledge of God's word and natural ignorance or blindness. Since we know only in part in this life, the knowledge of truth is always accompanied by ignorance in all who are enlightened. These two are contrary to one another and continually strive to overshadow and overwhelm each other.

This explains why even excellent theologians disagree on various points of religion — it is because natural blindness, still remaining, prevails more or less in each of them. If people with poor eyesight who cannot see without glasses were asked to identify something in the distance, most of them would give different descriptions of it. Enlightened and regenerate people in this life see only as in a mirror dimly. This should teach all students of theology to regularly question their own opinions and arguments, since even in those with the soundest judgment, the light of understanding is mixed with the darkness of ignorance. In many points they can see only as the man in the Gospel who, after Christ had partially opened his eyes, saw people walking but not as people — rather in the shape of trees. This should also teach all who read Scripture to call upon God to enlighten them by His Spirit and remove the haze of natural blindness. David was richly enlightened with the knowledge of God's word — surpassing even the ancient wise men and his own teachers — yet being aware of his own blindness, he often prays in the Psalms: 'Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things from Your law' (1 Corinthians 13).

Because of this combat, when natural blindness prevails, a child of God who is truly enlightened for eternal life may err — not only in minor points but even in foundational matters of religion, as the Corinthians and the Galatians did. And as one person may

err, so may a hundred. Indeed, an entire particular church may err. And as one church may err, so may a hundred more. In this respect, the condition of all people is the same. From this it is clear that the church militant on earth is subject to error. But just as physical diseases are of two kinds — some curable and some incurable, leading to death — so also are errors. The church, though subject to various falls, cannot err in foundational matters unto death. The errors of God's children are curable. Some may say: if all people and churches are subject to error, then it must not be right to join any of them — we should separate from all of them. My answer is: though they may and do err, we must not separate from them as long as they do not separate from Christ.

The second combat in the mind is between faith and unbelief. For faith is imperfect and mixed with its contrary — unbelief, presumption, doubt, and so on. As the man in the Gospel says: 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.'

Because of this combat, when unbelief prevails, even a true child of God may fall into fits and bouts of despair, as Job and David did in their times of trial. David once, reflecting on the prosperity of the wicked, broke out in these words: 'Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence.' This despair can become so extreme that it weakens and consumes the body more than any physical illness. No one should find this strange when it happens to a child of God. For though he may despair of his election and salvation in Christ, his despair is neither total nor final. It is not total, because he does not despair with his whole heart — faith is even at that moment striving against despair. It is not final, because he will recover before the end of his life (Psalm 73:13).

Moving on, the combat in the will works like this. The will partly chooses and partly rejects what is good at the very same moment, and likewise partly wills and partly rejects what is evil — because it is partly regenerate and partly unregenerate. The affections, which reside in the will, also partly embrace and partly avoid their objects. Love, for instance, partly loves and partly does not love God and the things that ought to be loved. Fear is mixed — not purely one kind, as some have imagined — but partly the reverent fear of a child and partly the fearful dread of a slave, causing the child of God to stand in awe of God not only for His mercies but also for His judgments and punishments. The will of a regenerate person is like a man who has one sound leg and one lame — every step he takes is neither a full limp nor a fully upright stride, but somewhere between the two. Or he is like a man in a boat on the river who moves upstream because the vessel carries him up, while at the same time walking toward the stern at the exact same moment. If someone objects that opposites cannot exist together in the same subject, the answer is that they cannot if either one is at full strength in the highest degree — but if both are weakened and reduced, they can coexist.

When corruption gains the upper hand over grace in the will and affections, a certain deadness or hardness of heart arises in the godly — which is simply a lack of feeling or spiritual sensitivity. Some may say this is a fearful judgment, but the answer is that there are two kinds of hardness of heart. The first kind takes complete possession of the heart and is never felt — this is the condition of those whose consciences have been seared, who through long habit in sin are past all feeling, and who despise the means God uses to soften hearts. That kind is indeed a fearful judgment.

There is another kind of hardness that is felt — and this is not as dangerous as the first. Just as we recognize our sickness by contrast with life and health, a hardness of heart that is felt is evidence of the presence of grace and a soft heart. David often complained of this in the Psalms, and the Israelites speak of it when they say: 'Why have You hardened our heart from Your ways?' (Ephesians 4:19; Zechariah 7:11; Isaiah 65:17).

That covers the specific nature of the combat. Before we go further, let us note what its outcome is.

The spirit prevails over the flesh at two times: throughout the course of a person's life, and at its end — though not without receiving some blows along the way.

The spirit prevails not in a single moment but over the whole course of a person's life. John says: 'He who is born of God does not sin, for he keeps himself, and the grace of God in his heart ordinarily prevails in him.' And Paul identifies the characteristic of the regenerate person as walking according to the spirit — which means not just taking an occasional step forward but maintaining a steady course in the way of godliness. It is like traveling from one end of the country to the other: a person may go off course now and then, but he quickly returns to the road and his overall direction is right (1 John 5:19; Romans 8:1).

The spirit also prevails at the end of a person's life, for at that point the flesh is completely abolished and sanctification is fully accomplished — because nothing unclean can enter the kingdom of heaven.

We must also understand that when the spirit prevails, it is not without resistance and struggle. As Paul testifies: 'For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.' This passage should not be understood only as referring to inward thoughts and impulses, as some would have it, nor only to particular failings — but to the general pattern of his duty and calling throughout the course of his whole life. It is like a person recovering from a serious illness who walks a few turns around the room and says: 'I wish I could walk more, but I cannot' — meaning not that he cannot walk at all, but that he cannot walk as much or as freely as he would like, since he tires quickly from his weakness.

I add further that this prevailing comes with blows received. A blow is when the flesh for a time conquers and subdues the spirit. In such a case, the regenerate person is like a soldier who has taken a blow that cracks his skull and lies dazed on the ground, unable to fight — or like someone having a seizure who lies temporarily motionless like a dead person. This raises the question of whether the flesh, when it prevails, does not extinguish the spirit entirely and cut a person off from Christ — so that he must be grafted in again. The answer is this. There are two kinds of Christians: the first professes Christ in name and outward appearance only — such a person is connected to Christ's mystical body no more genuinely than a wooden leg attached to a body is a true member of that body. The second is one who is in name and reality a living part and member of Christ. If the first kind falls, he cannot be said to be cut off, because he was never truly grafted in. If the second falls, he may be and is cut off from Christ — but note the way in which this happens. He is not completely cut off, but only in part — specifically with respect to the inner fellowship and com-

munion with Christ, but not with respect to his union with Him. A person's arm that has gone completely numb hangs there receiving no warmth, life, or feeling from the rest of the body or the head. Yet it remains attached to the body and can be restored through treatment. In the same way, after a serious fall, the child of God feels no inward peace or comfort and is struck in his conscience with the trembling of a spiritual paralysis for his sin — yet he remains before God a member of Christ, and will be restored to his former state through genuine repentance.

God permits these blows for weighty reasons. First, so that people may be humbled and broken before themselves by the awareness of their corrupt natures, and learn not to become proud on account of God's grace. Paul says that after he had been caught up into the third heaven, a messenger of Satan was sent to buffet him — to beat him severely — so that he would not become conceited. Second, so that we may learn to deny ourselves and hold to the Lord from the bottom of our hearts. Paul says that he was brought to the point of death so that he might not trust in himself but in God, who raises the dead (2 Corinthians 1:9).

That covers the nature of the combat. Now we come to its cause.

The cause is the opposition that exists between the flesh and the spirit. As Paul says: 'The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God' (Romans 8:5).

From this we learn that since the fall, there is no free will in man in spiritual matters — whether concerning the worship of God or eternal life. For flesh is simply our natural disposition, and by nature man is nothing but flesh. The spirit comes only afterward,

by grace. And yet the flesh is directly opposed to the spirit, which is what enables us to do what is pleasing to God. Therefore the will by nature is wholly enslaved to sin.

From this we also learn that practicing true religion — living according to the spirit — is no easy thing, since our natural disposition is as opposed to it as fire is to water. Therefore, if we will obey God, we must learn to force our natures to the duties of godliness, and put real effort and sweat into it.

Finally, we can also learn here the nature of sin. The spirit is not a substance but a quality. Therefore the flesh — which is nothing other than original sin and is contrary to the spirit — must also be a quality, since the nature of one contrary matches the nature of the other. In every person there is the substance of body and soul, and that substance cannot be sin — for if it were, then the spirit would also be a substance of man. There are also the faculties of body and soul, and they cannot be sin either — for then every person would have lost his faculties through Adam's fall. Finally, there is in the faculties a corruption or defilement that drives them against the law. That is properly what sin is — it is the flesh, which is contrary to the spirit.

The fourth point concerns who experiences this combat. Paul identifies them when he says: 'so that you cannot,' etc. From this it is clear that those who have this combat in them must be like the Galatians — people who are justified and sanctified. Yet not all such people, but only those who have reached the age of reason. The infants of believers, though we rightly consider them to belong to the kingdom of heaven and therefore to be justified and sanctified, have not yet committed actual sin, and therefore they do not yet experience this combat between flesh and spirit, which is an

active struggle. As for those who are unregenerate, they have never felt this kind of fight. Someone may say that even the worst person in the world, when he is about to commit a sin, has some inner conflict — and that is true, but it is a different kind of combat, one between conscience and the heart. On one side, the conscience frightens the person away from sin. On the other side, the will and affections drag and pull him toward it. The will and affections wish that sin were not sin and that God's commandment did not exist, while the conscience with a clear voice insists that sin is sin. This was the fight in Pilate, who was driven by his conscience to fear condemning Christ, yet was willing and yielded to condemning Him in order to please the people.

Furthermore, this combat exists in the regenerate only during the present life — those who are perfectly sanctified feel no such conflict. If someone says that this combat was present in Christ when He said, 'Father, if it is Your will, let this cup pass from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done' — there is indeed a conflict here, but of a different kind: the conflict between two distinct desires. The first was His desire to do His Father's will by suffering the death of the cross. The second was a natural human desire — which was no sin, but simply the weakness of human nature — by which He in His humanity desired, as it is natural for any creature to desire its own preservation, to be spared the accursed death of the cross.

The fifth point is the effect of this combat — which is to make the regenerate person unable to do what he would, both in matters of good and evil.

First, he cannot do the evil he would like to, for two reasons. The first is that he cannot commit sin whenever he chooses. John says: 'He who is born of God does not sin, and cannot sin, because he is born of God' — meaning he cannot sin whenever he pleases or at will. When Joseph was tempted by Potiphar's wife to commit adultery, the grace of God abounded in him and he answered her: 'How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?' — he could not sin at that moment. Lot, because his righteous soul was tormented by the wickedness he saw and heard in Sodom, could not sin as the people of Sodom did. From this it is clear that those who live in the daily practice of sin against their own consciences — even if they profess the true religion of Christ — have no sound grace within them (1 John 3:9).

Second, the regenerate person cannot sin in whatever manner he would. There are two reasons for this. First, he cannot sin with the full consent of his will or with his whole heart, because the will, insofar as it is regenerate, resists and pulls back. Even when a person is swept along by the passions of the flesh, he still feels some contrary impulses from a regenerate conscience. It is a true principle that sin does not reign in the regenerate. For just as grace is worked into the mind, will, and affections, the power of the flesh is proportionally reduced. Therefore when he commits any sin, he does it partly willingly and partly against his will. It is like the sailors in the storm who threw Jonah into the sea willingly — they chose to do it — and yet against their wills too, which is evident because they prayed, threw their goods overboard, and labored at the oars against the storm for a long time before they finally threw him out. This is the difference between two people committing the same sin — one regenerate and one unregenerate. The unregener-

ate person sins with his whole heart and full consent. The regenerate person does not. Second, though the regenerate person falls into sin, he does not stay in it long but quickly recovers by the power of grace in his heart.

From this it is clear that sins of weakness are committed only by those who are regenerate. The unregenerate person cannot sin out of weakness — whatever some falsely imagine. He is not weak in sin but completely dead in it. Sins of weakness are only those that arise from compulsion, fear, suddenness of emotion, and similar sudden passions in the regenerate. And though the regenerate often sin out of weakness because of this spiritual combat, they do not always — they can also sin knowingly and deliberately, against their conscience.

Now to the second point: the regenerate person cannot do the good he would like, because he cannot do it perfectly and completely according to God's will as he desires. Paul says: 'Willing is present with me, but the doing of the good is not.' In this respect the godly person is like a prisoner who has escaped from jail and, desperate to flee the keeper's reach, wants nothing more than to run a great distance in a single day. But because he has heavy chains on his legs, he can barely drag himself a mile or two — and that only by cutting his flesh and tormenting himself. So the servants of God genuinely desire and strive to obey God in all His commandments. As King Josiah 'turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses.' Yet because they are weighed down by the chains of the flesh, they perform obedience both slowly and weakly, with various stumbles and falls (Romans 7:18; 2 Kings 23:25).

That is enough on the combat itself. Now let us consider what use may be made of it.

First, from this we learn what the condition of a Christian is in this life. A Christian is not someone who is free from all evil thoughts, from rebellious impulses and desires in the will and affections, from all stumbles in his life and conduct — for such a person is a pure fantasy of the human mind, not found anywhere on earth. Rather, the true Christian is one who, feeling himself weighed down by the corruptions of his corrupt and rebellious nature, mourns them from his heart and fights against them with all his might through the grace of God's Spirit. From this, the Roman Catholic doctrine of merit and justification by works of grace is also overturned, like this. Works are only as good as their source. The source of a person's works is the mind, will, and affections — which have been sanctified, but in which flesh and spirit are still mixed together, as we have shown. Therefore even the best works of grace are mixed works — partly holy and partly sinful. It is plain to anyone with common sense that such works do not meet the standard of the law's righteousness, and therefore cannot earn life or justify a person before God. If someone replies that good works are the works of God's Spirit and are therefore perfectly righteous, my answer is: it is true that they proceed from the Holy Spirit, who cannot sin — but not directly or exclusively. They also proceed from the corrupt mind and will of the person, and in that respect become sinful — just as pure water flowing from a clean spring is made foul by a dirty channel.

Third, from this we learn that desire — or original sin — is truly and properly sin after baptism, whatever the Council of Trent has decreed. For after baptism it is directly opposed to the spirit and

rebels against it. Roman Catholics object that it is removed by baptism. Answer: original sin, or the flesh, is removed in the regenerate in the following way. It contains three elements: the guilt, the punishment, and the corruption. The first two are completely abolished by the merit of Christ's death in baptism. The third — the corruption — remains, but note in what condition: it remains weakened, and it remains unimputed to the believer's account.

Finally, from this we learn to be watchful in prayer. 'Watch and pray,' says Christ, 'for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.' When Rebecca felt two twins struggling in her womb, she was troubled and said, 'Why is this happening to me?' She went to ask the Lord — that is, through a prophet. So when we feel this inner battle, the best response is to turn to God in prayer and to His word, so that the spirit may be strengthened against the flesh. Just as the Israelites brought down the walls of Jericho by marching around the city for seven days and sounding the rams' horns, so through earnest calling on God's name the spirit is strengthened and the strongholds of the rebellious flesh are torn down.

The voice of a person in three conditions: - 1. Carnal: of evil — I do what is evil and I will do it. Of good — I do not do what is good and I will not do it. - 2. Regenerate: of evil — I do the evil I do not want to do. Of good — I do not do the good I want to do. - 3. Glorified: of evil — I do not do what is evil, and I will not do it. Of good — I do what is good and I will do it.

THANKS FOR READING



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