

The Duty of Repentance

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Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (Matt. 3:2)

The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent. (Acts. 7:30)

We have seen that religion is not confined to the intellect, but brings into exercise the strongest feelings of the heart. Love to God, and delight in his will and works, have been shown to be essential elements; and these are affections which do not play on the surface, but move the soul from its lowest depths. If, in our study of religious truth, we have proceeded thus far without feeling, without strong feeling, our labor has been unprofitable, and we would do well to begin anew. No time should be lost in securing the main end for which God's truth should be studied; and if heretofore we have treated it as we do the truths of other science, we should persevere in this course no longer, lest the profane use of sacred things become habitual, and provoke God to deny us his illuminating grace.

Love to God, and delight in his will and works, are holy and pleasurable exercises of the mind, but religion in a sinful being is necessarily attended with pain. To be at ease in sin, is a proof that the heart is dead, "dead in trespasses and sins." (Eph. 2:1)

Every one whom the spirit of God quickens, becomes sensible of sin, and feels the pang of a broken heart on account of it. The anguish of remorse may be alleviated by a sense of pardoning mercy, but the joy of pardon cannot stop the flow of penitence. Like the woman to whom much had been forgiven, the believer, while receiving his pardon with overflowing joy, does not lose his sense of sin, but is ready to wash the feet of his Lord with tears. These tears have their sweetness.

The necessity of repentance is abundantly taught in the sacred volume. The language of Christ is explicit, "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3) We have no right to consider ourselves in the way to eternal life, if we are strangers to repentance. Nor will it suffice to have been at some time alarmed about our sin. A false repentance, which needs to be repented of, satisfies many a deluded soul.

Genuine repentance is a deep-felt and abiding sense of sin, a condemnation of ourselves before God on account of it, a turning away from it with abhorrence and loathing, and a fixed purpose of soul never again to commit it, or be at peace with it. This sense of sin drives the soul to Christ, and unites with the exercise of faith in Christ, to distinguish genuine religion from the counterfeits with which the world abounds.

Reason teaches that it is the duty of men, as sinners, to repent of their sins. When one man has given just occasion of offence to another, by the common consent of mankind it is his duty to be sorry for his offence. If we have no sorrow for having offended God, we treat him with less respect than is due to a fellow-worm. Not to be sorry is to justify the offence, and virtually to repeat it. God searches our hearts, and knows our inmost thoughts, and if we remain impenitent after having sinned against him, it is as if we told him to his face that we did right to treat his authority with contempt. Our impenitence insults the majesty of heaven, and defies his wrath.

But the duty of repentance is not left to be inferred from the common sense of mankind. It is true, that no command to repent is found in the Decalogue. That summary of duty was given to men as men, and not as sinners. It was not designed to restore men to the favor of God, and therefore, did not treat with them as sinners. But when the gospel began to be preached, its first proclamation was, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 3:3)

In all the ministry of the gospel, this is the first duty required of men. Without it, not a step can be taken in the way of return to God, and without it, there is no possibility of obtaining the divine favor. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." It is, therefore, of the very highest importance to understand what repentance is, and to have such views of truth as will tend to produce it in our hearts.

When we approach a fellow-man whom we have offended, to offer to him our confessions, and seek his pardon, it is expected that we shall be sensible of having done wrong, shall regret the deed, blame ourselves for it, acknowledge his right to be displeased, and resolve, perhaps promise, to do so no more. All this must exist in repentance toward God, if we do not mean to repeat our insults to the Searcher of hearts. We may deceive a man like ourselves with professions of penitence that are insincere, and designed merely to propitiate him, but God cannot be deceived, and to attempt it is to mock him.

In order to sincere repentance toward God, it is indispensable that we should understand that we have sinned against him. Men do not usually compare their actions with his righteous law, but with the actions of other men. We walk according to the course of this world, and are satisfied if we conform to such rules of conduct as are esteemed reputable among men. Multitudes pass through life without any proper conviction of sin, and die impenitent, and who have never examined and tried their conduct by a higher rule. To undeceive such persons, and to strip them of such false and delusive pleas, it is necessary to convince them that the course of this world is downward and wicked, and that their conformity to it should alarm rather than satisfy them.

We do not truly repent of an offence to a fellow-man, and sincerely ask pardon, unless we believe that he has just cause to be offended. If his displeasure has arisen from mere mistake, we expect to appease him by giving such information as will correct his mistake. If he has become displeased through mere captiousness, we may justify ourselves before him, and convict him of the wrong. In order to the exercise of genuine repentance towards God, we must know that he has a right to be displeased with us, that he has made no mistake in the matter, and that every attempt of ours to convict him of wrong in the case, will be abortive. To impress all this deeply on our minds, it is only necessary we should be fully convinced that we are under just condemnation from God, and that all our pleas in self-justification are without foundation.

Good men have been accustomed to draw motives to penitence from the doctrines that have been mentioned. David humbled himself before God, with a confession of his natural depravity. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalm 51:5) He viewed his sin with the greater abhorrence, as he saw and confessed the justice of the condemnation which it received from his Judge. "That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." (Psalm 51:4)

True repentance is rendered more deep and pungent by a view of the wretchedness and helplessness which sin has brought upon us. So Paul exclaimed, "O wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24)



John's Preaching of Repentance

William C. Duncan

From *The Life, Character and Acts of John the Baptist*, 1853

Prepared by God, by whose voice he was at length summoned forth, in quiet solitude for his prophetic calling, endowed with power to perform the duty entrusted to him, and enlightened as far as was necessary to the discharge of the duties of his office, John made his appearance in the neighborhood of the Jordan, where contiguity to large towns and commercial roads would afford him access to great multitudes of people, where his preaching might be farthest extended in influence, and the reputation of his labors be the most noised abroad. According to Matthew, his residence was, ordinarily, that portion of the region round about Jordan which bordered upon the Dead Sea, and from which a steppe stretched away into the land of Judea; whence it is called by that evangelist, "the wilderness of Judea."

Here it was that John first made his public appearance, but his ministry was not long restricted to this particular theatre. He made his way northwardly until he came into the vicinity of the Jordan, where his opportunities for meeting with hearers were most numerous; and here he prosecuted during his brief career the labors which had been imposed upon him by Jehovah.

It was in the river Jordan that John, as was his custom, was now performing the rite of baptism, "because," as Olshausen says, "the water there, being deep, afforded conveniences for immersion," and not, as some suppose, in a fountain or stream pertaining particularly to the town of Ænon.—Here, at Ænon, the Baptist prosecuted his ministry for a time, but soon after, crossing over into Perea, he was seized by Herod, and cast into prison. That side of the Jordan, therefore, on which he had commenced administering his baptism (John 10:40), was the one on which his labors at length came to a close.

Mark says nothing respecting the time at which John made his public appearance. Matthew connects his narrative of the Baptist with what he says respecting the birth of Christ with the insignificant words, "in those days". Luke alone fixes it by a precise chronological statement. The latter evangelist dates his appearance "in the fifteenth year of Tiberius" (31), who, it is known, succeeded to the administration of the Roman empire in the year 767 of the city Rome (19th of August) and 14 of the Christian era it was, therefore, in the year 29 after Christ, at which time Jesus, if he was really born in the year 4 A.C., must have been 33 years old, and John six months older. It may indeed be that the number of the years of Tiberius' reign is here reckoned from the time he was made co-regent with Augustus, and, in such event, this occurrence must have taken place from two to four years earlier.

There is, however, no decisive ground for this supposition, for it is not at all probable that the reign of Tiberius is dated by Luke farther back than the death of Augustus, who illuminated everything in such a degree by the splendor of his name, that Tiberius would scarcely have been thought worthy of being reckoned the ruler of the empire so long as he was still alive.

Pontius Pilate governed, at this time, as procurator, the land of , for, after the banishment of Archelaus, the son of Herod the Great (Matt. 1 22), his possessions, Judea, Samaria and Idumea, were ruled over by Roman procurators (from 6 A.D.) of whom the fifth was Pontius Pilate. Since this governor, on going to Rome, to plead to an accusation before the emperor, in the tenth year of his office, found Tiberius dead on his arrival at that city (789 A.U.C. and 37 A.D.), he must have been in power about two years at the period when John commenced his public preaching. If, therefore, we suppose Luke to reckon the beginning of Tiberius' administration from his co-regency with Augustus, it would scarcely give time for Pilate to have obtained his government.

This was the time, then, in which, as Luke narrates, John was summoned from his retirement by the Lord, and began to preach publicly "the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"; that is, he invited the people to receive baptism, in

order to show thereby their repentance, and that they might be able to hope for the forgiveness of their sins. In the next section we shall examine with somewhat of minuteness into the meaning of this expression, when we come to a more particular consideration of the baptism of John; while we shall confine ourselves here to the special examination, by way of preliminary, of that one of the two separate and yet intimately connected offices of his ministry which constituted the preparation for the other, viz. the repentance which he required as an indispensable pre-requisite to his baptism.

The subject-matter of the preaching of John is given in Matt. 3:2, in words consonant with the accounts of Mark and Luke: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." By repentance (Greek, literally, a change of mind, or purpose), he evidently meant to imply not merely sorrow and contrition for sins which were past, but also an earnest effort on the part of the repentant to free himself from sin, to obtain another disposition, and to act in accordance with the will of God. The repentance, therefore, which he required, included the effort to acquire a pure heart and a God-fearing disposition, which should evince itself outwardly in good works, and in the attempt to atone for former guilt of conduct by a present contrary practice of virtue.

It is agreed by all lexicographers of eminence that the word "repent", as used by the Baptist as well as by Christ and the Apostles, means much more than it does in ordinary English usage. Meyer in his *Commentary* (on Matt. 3:2) has the following on the word:

"*metanoete*, signifies the change of the moral disposition which was required in order to obtain a share in the Messianic kingdom." De Wette defines still more closely: "*sententiam mutare*" (change your minds), *resipiscite* (return to your senses), *bessert euch* (reform), a technical expression and ruling idea of Christianity, deeper and more comprehensive than the Hebrew *nicham*, (for which the Septuagint has *metanoein*) and *shuble* (which is equivalent to *metanoein* in Aquilas, ed. quint.), and also more comprehensive than the *metanoein* of the Apocrypha (Wisdom 5:3, Sirach 17:24); connecting with the idea of a new life."

An examination of all the passages in the New Testament in which this word and its cognate *metanoia* (translated in the received version by repentance) occur, will show that the verb ought to be rendered in almost every case by reform, and the noun by reformation; for such is most clearly the sense in which the terms are employed by the inspired authors of the New Testament.

That John really comprehended all that is described above under his idea of repentance is made particularly clear by the maxims of conduct which he inculcated upon the several classes of people who came to him, and inquired in what manner they should manifest their repentance (Luke 3 11-14). He had just previously informed them that they should bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that is, that they should exhibit by their mode of life the fruit of their repentance, and they now ask of him, what they must do to meet the conditions of this requirement. John might now have insisted directly upon the necessity of a new disposition, but the principle of love had not yet appeared in the flesh as the model and representative of all races, and the people were yet too much taken up with the merely external to receive any great amount of enlightenment from such a description of the new state of mind which was implied in repentance.

For minds such as theirs, which, as is evinced even by their question, could comprehend nothing beyond the outward and what occurred before their eyes, the outward had to be brought prominently forward. Not because the essence of holiness and righteousness consisted therein, but because it was only by these single cases, as by examples, that it could be shown to them in what manner they were on all occasions to conduct themselves, in order that, by means of the outward expression of the disposition which they wished to obtain. That is, by their actions, they might gradually come to a knowledge of the disposition itself, and, forming themselves inwardly from without, finally make it their own.

We perceive, therefore, that John adopted that same wise proceeding, the only one in fact which was adapted to the standpoint of the people,—which Christ put into operation in his sermon on the mount, when he exhibited to men an example of a perfect pious action as a mirror, in order that they might by looking in it perceive the contrast made by their own conduct,

and that, in the effort to conform to this model instituted by him, they might appropriate to themselves also the disposition from which those good works flow.

As Christ did there, so did John here exhibit in the most natural manner unto each individual among his hearers the precise contrast to the vice which he most frequently practised and which was most deeply rooted in his affections.—Thus, he impressed it as a duty upon the people at large, the most of whom were either Pharisees or Sadducees, whose selfishness exhibited itself most prominently in covetousness and want of benevolence (for they only gave the alms prescribed by the law), that they should continually communicate to the necessitous a portion of their possessions and property, if they were not compelled to use it for the supply of their own necessities.

To the tax-gatherers (i.e. publicans) who were continually guilty of committing the greatest injustice and extortion, he assigned it as their duty that they should take no more from the people than was right and appointed by law. He commanded the Roman soldiers, on the other hand, who allowed themselves to be guilty of every kind of oppression and annoyance towards a subjugated people, to do violence to no man and to oppress none, to be satisfied with their pay and not to be covetous of more.

Thus John understood how to adapt to the stand-point of every one, in a manner intelligible to each, that great and simple command, "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;" and, if each one had only struggled with serious earnestness against his cherished sin, he would without doubt have attained to the right disposition, and this would in every case have produced in each an apprehension of the right and the true.

John, however, not only required the nation in general to repent, or, as we have seen that he implied under the idea of repentance, to produce the righteous fruits which belong to its exercise, but he also assigned, as the true inducement to its fulfillment, the reason why it was so particularly necessary to repent; "for," said he, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The appellation "kingdom of heaven" is found only in Matthew, though we read in II Tim. 4:18. "the heavenly kingdom," a wording entirely correspondent in sense, though not in form. Elsewhere in the New Testament, and also in Matthew, the same idea is given by other equivalent expressions, "kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14, and elsewhere), "kingdom of Christ" (Matt. 13:41, 20:21, Rev. 1:9), "kingdom of Christ and God" (Eph. 5:5), and "kingdom of David" (Mark 11:10). The idea conveyed by these different forms of expression is one and the same, the divine spiritual kingdom, the reign of the Messiah.

What then did John understand by the phrase "the kingdom of heaven"? A heavenly kingdom had already been founded by means of the old covenant made with the patriarchs of the Jewish people, which had subsequently been renewed, confirmed and more firmly grounded upon the basis of the Old Testament with the people in the time of Moses in which kingdom God ruled unlimited as the absolute sovereign of the Israelitish nation by means of his organs and representatives. But this divine kingdom was, and from its nature could only be, imperfect.

The laws of God were frequently broken through the hard-heartedness and worldly inclination of the people. Those who should have been his organs were but too often only the instruments of sin; disturbances and revolts of the whole nation from their heavenly king but too frequently occurred. And if this defection did not display itself outwardly and universally, it was exhibited so much the more by individuals among the nation and showed itself in thoughts and actions which were enlisted in the service of sin rather than in that of the divine sovereign. The kingdom of God, therefore, had never appeared in its full perfection; and the observant must soon have become conscious of the difference between what it actually was and what it should have been.

A new epoch, accordingly, had to be introduced by a new act of the divine power, such an epoch as had been long since announced in the promises of the Old Testament, and had been earnestly looked for by all believers in which a separation was to be made in the multitude who now boasted themselves in their appellation of "people of God," and only the true servants of God were to be chosen as the citizens of the kingdom, while the rest were to be rejected, when God should, by means of an instrument truly correspondent to its vocation, rule over this new kingdom, which, on its part, should never more be subjected to change and degeneracy by sin working from within, or from enemies attacking from without. In a

word, when all the precious promises respecting a happy, untroubled life and uninterrupted enjoyment should be fulfilled in the utmost measure, so that for the members of this kingdom heaven should in truth have descended to earth.

Since John and a few of his contemporaries,—each of whom, however, hoped for the satisfaction of his own individual, and often not very pure, wishes, from the entrance of this heavenly kingdom,—recognized the fact that this celestial reign was to be one thoroughly spiritual; so did he, still further, recognize the additional fact, that entrance into it would be allowed only to those who turned in repentance unto God; and therefore he proposed repentance as the chief and fundamental condition of participation in its enjoyments.

Just as clearly did he perceive that unrepentant and obdurate sinners would become obnoxious to divine punishment on the coming of this new kingdom (although, as we further see, he conceived of this punishment, in a manner not accordant with the truth, as connected externally with the appearance of the Messiah; compare, on the other hand, the words of Christ, John 3:13, 19); and, in order to exhibit this more intelligibly to the people, he makes use of the two similes, or comparisons, which we have recorded in Matt. 3 :10, and 12, and in Luke 3 :9, and 17.

He likens the people to trees, which, by the nature of their fruit, it being either good or bad, enable us to tell whether they are also inwardly pure and healthy, or not, and says: "The trees which bring forth unsound fruit, —therefore the men whose actions evince the impurity of their minds,—shall be destroyed and burnt; and, in truth, the axe now lieth at their root, therefore their judgment is near at hand, and in a short time they shall receive their punishment."

The second representation (3: 17) is that of a farmer, who throws up against the wind, with his winnowing-shovel, the corn which has been threshed upon the threshing-floor, in the open air, and thereby causes the chaff to be carried away by the wind, and the pure heavy corn to fall to the ground; who then collects together the pure corn and brings it into his granary, but burns the chaff. So also will Christ do. He will make a separation between the true wheat, the valuable and useful corn, the children of God, and the chaff, the valueless sons of the world and of vanity. The true wheat will he collect into barns, therefore will claim it as his property and under his protection, but he will burn the chaff with un-quenchable fire, which is meant, perhaps, to express the large amount of the matter collected and the long duration of the punishment, as well as the complete destruction of sinners.

The "floor" here spoken of is what is technically called a threshing-floor, a circular space in the open air, the ground of which has been leveled and beaten hard. On this the grain was deposited, and, in the time of our Saviour threshed either by the hoofs of oxen or by machines drawn by oxen. Here, it is most probable, the term threshing-floor is used briefly to denote the grain that lay upon it, as in Ruth 3:2, Job 39:12.—The "chaff" here mentioned, is not merely such in its narrow sense, but includes also the broken straw, or stubble, which was left after the operation of winnowing had been completed. This in Palestine was used for fuel.

From these expressions of John, it seems clear that he conceived of the judgment as something external which was to make its appearance on the coming of the Messiah that he, therefore, thought that the Messiah himself was to come as the judge (cp. on the other hand, John. 3:17). And, since he could not do this without considering the founder of the new kingdom not merely a spiritual but also an earthly, worldly, lord and ruler, he was accustomed to picture to himself the new kingdom as also worldly and earthly, though resting upon a truly spiritual foundation.

Neander, in his *Life of Jesus*, develops in his usual felicitous manner the conception which the Baptist entertained respecting the calling and work of the Messiah and the nature of his kingdom:

"He contradicts the notion so prevalent among the Jews that all the descendants of Abraham who outwardly observed the religion of their fathers would be taken into the Messiah's kingdom, while his heavy judgments would fall upon the pagans alone. On the contrary, he maintains the necessity, for all who would enter that kingdom, of a moral new birth, which he sets forth to them by the spirit-baptism; and proclaims, as a necessary preparation for this new birth, a consciousness of sin and longing to be free from it; all which is implied in the word *metanoia* (reformation), when stated as the necessary condition of obtaining the promised baptism of the Spirit.

"He expects this kingdom to be visible; but yet conceives it as purely spiritual, as a community filled and inspired by the Spirit of God, and existing in communion of the divine life, with the Messiah as its visible King; so that, what had not been the case before, the theocracy and its manifestation should precisely correspond to each other. He has already a presentiment that the willing among the pagans will be incorporated into the kingdom in place of the unworthy Jews who shall be excluded. The appearance of the Messiah will cause a sifting of the theocratic people.

"This pre-supposes that he will not overturn all enemies and set up his kingdom at once by the miraculous power of God, but will manifest himself in such a form that those whose hearts are prepared for his coming will recognize him as the Messiah, while those of ungodly minds will deny and oppose him. On the one hand, a community of the righteous will gather around him of their own accord; and, on the other, the enmity of the corrupt multitude will be called forth and organized. The Messiah must do battle with the universal corruption, and, after the strife has separated the wicked members of the theocratic nation from the good, will come forth victorious, and glorify the purified people of God under his own reign."

In the expectation of the near approach of the judgment John addressed the multitude which had resorted to him, the most of whom consisted, according to Matt. 3:7, of Pharisees and Sadducees, and who, therefore, had, doubtless, come to the pious man in an unholy and unrepentant frame of mind, and threatened them with punishment: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" That is, who hath persuaded you, you so holy and pure a people in your own estimation, to flee from the approaching wrath of God, and that you should come to baptism in order to evince your repentant disposition?

He hints to them here with strong and bitter irony the real intention which they had in professing repentance and consequently in submitting to baptism; for they; as we shall see hereafter, were for the most part by no means of a repentant mind (cp. Luke 1: 30), and John penetrated at once their real design in presenting themselves to him for baptism. Since they were in his presence, however, the Baptist treats them as persons who had come to him in all sincerity, and proceeds with holy seriousness, "If you would really flee from the judgment, act as a sincere change of disposition requires, and suffer not yourselves to be led away by the thought 'we have Abraham for our father' and are therefore freed from all liability to punishment, and are of right citizens of the new kingdom."

This was a customary boast of the Jews, the bulwark behind which they always entrenched themselves, that, in consequence of their bodily descent from Abraham, God must of necessity be gracious unto them, and bestow upon them in preference to all, if not on them alone, all the blessings which they, in their earthly misconceptions of the prophetic promises, expected from the appearance of the Messianic kingdom. The falseness of this idea, however, was evident to those who entertained the true view of the moral nature of this kingdom and of the repentance which formed its groundwork. Such a more correct insight into its real nature not only John possessed, but, as we have seen in a former section, many others, as Simeon, among the nobler-minded and more advanced of his people.

"This descent," says John in manner of speaking, "is of no advantage; it is and can be at most, only fleshly, and unaccompanied by a right disposition has no worth. God could make these stones which lie around, children of Abraham as truly as you are, viz., in respect to real character, not as to physical creation. His power is unlimited; he is not bound to adhere to the fleshly descendants of Abraham, but if you are not worthy, he is at liberty to choose from among other people the heirs of the promises made to Abraham. A total change of disposition can alone make you partakers once more of the lost heritage, and protect you from the anger of God; and indeed it is high time to make this change, for the judgment is already at your doors."

Such is the course of thought in this speech of John's, which we find in nearly the same words in Matt. 3:1-10, and Luke 3:7-9. The apparent discrepancies which exist here between the narratives of Matthew and Luke are easily harmonized. Luke represents the address of John as directed to the people at large, the multitude that came out to hear his preaching; and it is entirely appropriate as so addressed, for the majority of them, being Pharisees, rejected the counsel of the Baptist, as we learn from Luke 7:30 (coll. Matt. 21:32, and 11:16).

This evangelist, however, evidently speaks generally, not intending to denote the particular classes to whom John's discourse was specially addressed, just as we would say, in popular language (and such is the language of the Scriptures), "he denounced the assembly," when in fact we mean, and are understood as meaning, that he denounced only a particular class of persons present in the assembly. Matthew speaks more definitely, representing the discourse as addressed in particular to the Pharisees and Sadducees; and such, no doubt, was the fact. Both accounts, therefore, are correct; but Luke's is the more general—Matthew's the more specific—yet are we not to conclude from these representations that no Pharisees or Sadducees believed in and were baptized by John.

From this discourse of John's we may form a pretty clear idea of the manner and scope of his preaching. Upright, repentant hearts he attempted to lead upward to a more perfect purity, and to a struggling with their cherished sins, by pointing them to the near approach of the heavenly kingdom, the citizens of which all pious souls were destined to be. The obdurate, on the other hand, and the haughty he sought to crush with the whole power of his pious earnestness, to represent them in their nakedness and sinfulness, to terrify them with the threatening of that fearful punishment by which they were shortly to be overtaken, to remove from beneath them the props of their confidence, which were founded on human wisdom, and so, perhaps, by the might of his word to subdue sinners that were not yet totally hardened and callous, and bring them with anxious sorrow to repentance.



The Free Agency of Man

W. B. Johnson

From *The Baptist Pulpit*, 1850

As a free agent, man has life and death set before him, with the liberty of choosing the one, and rejecting the other. As a fallen creature, he is an enemy to God, and without the provision of mercy in his Son, would forever remain such. Descending to the abode of the devil and his angels, as a company of kindred spirits, he would forever unite with them in their unhallowed opposition to their common Creator.

Mutual crimination and joint blasphemy against their Maker would render them as miserable as their capacity would admit. But now, the announcement of pardon and restoration invites him to return.

"Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah 1:18)

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, came, buy wine and milk, without money and without price." (Isaiah 55:1)

As moral agents, for whom there is hope, I call upon you, then, fellow-sinners, to turn to the Lord; for thus saith the Lord, "Say unto them, as I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?" (Ezekiel 33:11)

Your God commands, invites, entreats.

Open your ears, and hear the word of this salvation which is sent unto you, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." (Psalm 2:12)

As disobedient subjects, as prodigal sons, come back. Your Sovereign is ready to receive you—your father's arms and house are open to embrace and entertain you. Come, then, the fatted calf shall be killed for you, the best robe shall be put upon you, joy and gladness shall thrill through your ransomed, heaven-born souls. The church on earth shall rejoice. Attending angels shall bear the tidings to the throne of the Eternal, and the holy company of cherubim and seraphim in his presence, shall make all heaven resound with hallelujahs of praise to God and the Lamb.

But if ye refuse the invitations of love and mercy, and will not have the man Christ Jesus to reign over you, if ye will continue in sin, ye must receive its wages—death—eternal death. You must see that man Christ Jesus on the judgment-seat, and hear from his sacred lips the sentence – “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” (Matt. 25:41) But you will be your own destroyer. The Judge will only, as the organ of insulted justice and violated law, pronounce the sentence which you will have drawn down on your own head.

Now, now, O fellow-sinners, you have it in your power to place yourselves under influences that are spiritual and saving, or under influences that are carnal and damning. You can read the Bible, or the book of infidelity; the sermon of truth, or the novel of fiction; you can attend the party of sinful pleasure, or the meeting for holy prayer; you can go to the midnight revel, or to the house of God. You can lift up the prayer of the publican, or the howl of the bacchanal. You can utter the praise of the Most High, or belch out the blasphemy of the arch-fiend. How solemn the responsibilities that are upon you!

Under what awful accountability does your free agency place you! The freedom to choose is the freedom to reject. O, exercise this freedom aright! Pause, consider your latter end.

"Choose you this day whom ye will serve." (Joshua 24:15)

"If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him." (I Kings 18:21)

Difficulties attend the decision. For their removal, search the Scriptures; implore the teaching of the Holy Spirit, whom God will give to all who ask for him in sincerity. And O, may He enlighten the eyes of your understanding, and give you to see Christ in the Scriptures as your "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." (I Cor. 1:30)



The Crucified Redeemer Preached at Corinth

E. T. Winkler
From *The Baptist Pulpit*, 1850

Corinth was the wealthiest and most beautiful city of Greece. It is not to our purpose to expatiate upon the extent of that commerce, which constituted this city a great treasure-house of nations, and made her merchants kings, or upon that culture which gave generals to head the armies of the republics of Greece, or on that refinement which filled her streets and palaces with the choicest and most beautiful productions of art, but we would speak of her religion.

It was the religion of their fathers, and therefore venerable. It was the religion of art, and therefore beautiful. The imagination regarding it became entranced and lost in its exceeding loveliness. The reason, nicely scrutinizing it, on a sudden shrinks back, appalled from the presence and by the fear of those awful beings, the objects of a people's admiration.

For century after century, it had been interweaving the threads of its mythology among the fibres of the national heart. It was the theme of those popular ballads that, more efficiently than laws, mould and determine public character. It had inspired those loftier poetic strains, which, requiring centuries for their production, never die, and never lose their influence. To a people passionately fond of beauty, it had given streets adorned with colossal monuments and religious emblems, and had thrown open temples, in which the architect, and the painter, and the sculptor had combined to exhibit the beauty of classic taste, and upon which the merchant had lavished the treasures of commercial opulence.

And when we remember that the Corinthians sang the poems which Homer sung, and admired the works which Phidias and Protogenes wrought that the sculptured majesty of Jupiter hurling his thunderbolt, and Apollo touching his marble harp, towered from their temple pavements, and the penciled loveliness of the sea-born Venus smiled on them from the temple walls; that every grove, and spring, and mountain had its genius; that the stars were ruled by awful spirits, and the caves of the ocean inhabited by lovely shapes; and when we remember, too, that all these forms of beauty and of awe were the offspring of their religion, we can readily imagine how it must have interwoven itself into the hopes and fears, the admiration and love, of this classic people.

We can readily imagine with what a mixture of horror and disgust they saw the apostle attacking, beneath the very shadow of their gods, the religion of their fathers. A foreigner (a barbarian, as the Greeks termed him), standing in the midst of the splendors of Paganism, assaulted the religion of poetry, of beauty, and of art!

The inimitable productions of the Grecian masters were all around him, but he passed them coldly by. The pompous processions, and the Isthmean games, and the imposing ceremonies of Paganism, would naturally have attracted the curiosity of a stranger, but they had no charms for him.

The sophist reasoned in the groves and porticoes, upon the principles of nature and philosophy, but the apostle neither to dispute with the sophist, nor to gain instruction from the lips of the philosopher. Paul was a man of refinement, and versed in Hebrew, and to a considerable extent in Grecian literature, but he looked upon the refinements of Corinth as vanities. And all that was imposing to the Grecian idolater was to him but as the sounding brass and the tinkling cymbal.

Pervaded by one great idea, animated by one astonishing fact, he said nothing, heard nothing, cared for nothing, but what pertained to the great object of his mission and apostolic labors. For "I, brethren, when I came unto you," he says, "came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom; declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." (I Cor. 2:1, 2)

It is utterly impossible for language to express the claims of Christianity more forcibly and fully than they were expressed, under these circumstances, by these words. It is as if the apostle had said:

"The religion of Jesus comprehends facts, and involves duties, compared with which, human enterprise and human thought, the accumulated wealth of centuries, and the grand intellectual and moral progress and works of a nation, sink into insignificance. I see the wings of your commerce whitening the Mediterranean. I behold the labors of the husbandman, adorning your fields with nodding harvests. I see the immortal works of art, that beautify the streets and temples of your city—but they are to me as if they were not.

"Another subject, better and nobler, occupies my thoughts and inspires my actions. It is the religion that, turning away from the marble and the canvass, from the altar and the temple, takes up its abode in the heart, even of the humblest of men, and makes it the temple of the living God. It is the worship of a Spiritual Deity. It is the doctrine, that taking its place at the feet, looks upward ever to the countenance of Jesus, that surrounds with glory the cross on which they have crucified my Lord. And this religion is the one thing needful; this is the all in all."



Which Church Should I Join? Does it Make Any Difference What I Believe? _____

Norman H. Wells

From *The Church That Jesus Loved*, 1973 (Chapter 8)

It is not too difficult to discover the religious viewpoint that is prevalent in America today. All one has to do is listen to the conversations pertaining to religion and invariably something like the following remarks will be heard:

- "It doesn't matter much what a man believes as long as he is sincere and does what is right."
- "All religions are about equally good."
- "We may be taking different roads but we are all bound for the same place."
- "All we need do is live by the golden rule."

Whichever of these expressions, or others like them that are used, they all have a common sentiment. They reject the importance of any kind of doctrine. The very word "doctrine" has come to produce an unpleasant reaction in the minds of most folks.

Religious Indifference

Denomination lines have become so blurred that people can skip from church to church and never realize a difference. They naturally come to the opinion that, after all, there isn't much difference! Religious indifference! What a spectacle! We have hundreds of denominations all proclaiming to believe different creeds and emphasizing conflicting doctrines and at the same time declaring it doesn't make any difference what a person believes!

Simple logic tells us that contradictory statements cannot be true at the same time! If one statement is true then all statements which contradict it are false! Hundreds of denominations holding creeds and doctrines that contradict each other cannot all be true!

Simple Logic

Suppose an arithmetic teacher gave the same problem to four different boys and got four different answers. Naturally, only one of them could be right. Suppose, however, this teacher is fearful of causing disruption in his class, or perhaps of offending one of the pupils, so he just tells them they are all right! One arithmetic problem yielded four different answers and no one was wrong — everyone was right! Ridiculous! If we can recognize how illogical this is, why can't we see that all beliefs can't be right?

There was a time when Christians were willing to die rather than deny or change one bit the doctrine they believed. It was fresh in their minds that Christ died the same way.

Jesus Christ Himself condemned religious indifference. Christ commanded His followers for all ages to teach the exact truth He had delivered unto them and to demand that all believers accept this truth.

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe

all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matt. 28:18-20)

This commission was two-fold. First, they were to preach the gospel to all nations. Secondly, they were to teach the identical doctrines that He had taught them. They were not to preach or teach their own ideas or whims but were charged to "teach them all things whatsoever I have commanded you." They were not to teach one doctrine and eliminate another. The entire truth hung together as one great organic whole.

Christians Commanded To Accept Truth!

The plain teaching of all scripture establishes the fact that believers are commanded of Christ to accept all of His truth. They are not to add, dilute, edit or change it in any way. The whole New Testament echoes the teaching of Christ that there is one truth and God's people should be united in accepting it.

Any thoughtful person who carefully considers these facts is brought face to face with the question, "Which church is the one that is declaring the truth? Which church is right? Which are wrong? How can I know the true church?"

The quickest way to receive an answer to these questions is to determine which church Christ Himself founded. When Jesus Christ founded His church, He promised that that church would never go out of existence. "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matt. 16:18)

The Church Lives!

The promise that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" can only mean the church Christ established was never to be destroyed but would exist in every age. If we accept God's Word then we are certain that the church Christ established lives today. It becomes vitally important to know which, of all the hundreds of conflicting claims, is true! How can we know?

The Church In History

Some would try to trace their church back through the pages of history to Christ. There is no doubt that if this could be done history would identify the church Christ established. However, history is man's word for what happened and is subject to error, therefore, this cannot be the final test! Actually there is but one test! Each believer has the God-given right to make this test!

Amid all of the chaos of confusion that exists among the hundreds of conflicting religions there exists only one source of information that is without error — the inspired Word of God! This then is all we can turn to! Man can be wrong. Churches can be wrong! Only God's Word stands without error! This is where we must look!

This book, the Bible, the Holy Inspired Word of God, gives us the history, the message and the methods of the New Testament church! Its pages give us an accurate description of the church that Christ founded, its organization, its officers, its mission, etc.

This then is the only test! Which churches in existence today have the same methods, the same purpose, the same message, the same organization, etc., as that of the church described in the pages of the New Testament?

It is here that true Baptists rest their case! We believe that when a sincere believer opens his Bible and makes this test, he can only come to a real Baptist church.



A Hint to Parents

T. M.

From *The Baptist Magazine*, February 1817

DISSIMULATION, n. [L., to make like; like.] The act of dissembling; a hiding under a false appearance; a feigning; false pretension; hypocrisy. Dissimulation may be simply concealment of the opinions, sentiments or purpose; but it includes also the assuming of a false or counterfeit appearance which conceals the real opinions or purpose. Dissimulation among statesmen is sometimes regarded as a necessary vice, or as no vice at all. Let love be without dissimulation. Romans 12. (*Webster's 1812 Dictionary*)

Dissimulation is an odious vice. In young persons this vice is peculiarly hateful, because in them we naturally expect to meet with truth and sincerity. Whatever maybe the complexion of their minds; whose dispositions have been moulded by a close and continued contact with a world full of selfishness, young people, who have not been exposed to similar temptations, should be patterns of simplicity and sincerity. Yet it is but too evident, that the minds of many, in the early years of life, are familiar with duplicity and prevarication.

If this remark were applicable to such only as are educated in irreligious families, or are left, unhappily, without any culture but what chance throws in their way, such a state of mind might be contemplated as the natural effect of a depraved heart. What else can be expected, when the thorns and thistles of native depravity are not plucked up, and the seeds of virtue and piety not attempted to be sown by a religious education! But the fact is that this vice not only exists, but occasionally exhibits a luxuriant growth in the minds of children, whose parents stand high in the world for Christian excellence.

If we wish to cure an evil, we must first inquire into its cause. What, then, is the origin of this vice is or, if its origin, in common with every other, evil, is to be found in the native depravity of the heart, what are those circumstances which may have contributed to its growth and maturity?

It replying to this question, I am sorry to find myself under the necessity of referring to the example set before children under the parental roof. I am not alluding to the example set by servants, who, if they are unprincipled, will, in order to ingratiate themselves with the children, most affectingly corrupt their moral feelings. It will therefore be proper, if the interactions between servants and children cannot be wholly suspended, that great care should be taken in their selection, and constant watchfulness be exercised over their conduct. But a much more pernicious example is that which, at times, is set by the parents themselves; because here the child has no one to guard it, and never suspects that it has any need to guard against anything which it observes in so beloved a relative. And probably I may be asked, I sit likely that any pious parent will set an example of duplicity and prevarication before a child? I will endeavour to explain myself.

It happens not infrequently that the husband and wife are not exactly similar in their tempers and dispositions. For instance, the father may be strict, harsh, and somewhat severe. The mother on the contrary, may be lenient and indulgent even to a fault. We will suppose a child to have committed an offence; it may be a slight one. The mother, in order to avoid the displeasure of the father, covers and hides, by partial statements and innuendoes, if not by direct falsehood, the transgression of her child.

What the child sees in a parent whom he tenderly loves, and what he is perhaps directed to do by that very parent to save himself from punishment cannot easily be conceived of as a vice by the child. Again, the father may be economical and prudent, bordering even upon parsimony. The mother may be generous and open-hearted even to extravagance. While a little family is growing up to maturity many occasions of difference in sentiment will arise, relating to dress, education, companions, &c. which, as they cannot be settled by private explanation between the parents, will issue in a system of petty fraud and deceit.

How many times has a weak mother said, "Here, my child, take this, but be sure not to tell your father," little considering that for a momentary, perhaps paltry gratification, she is doing her child a lasting and serious injury. A child should not be taught to conceal anything from a parent. It should always be directed to look to its father and mother as its best friends and guardians. But by the conduct we are censuring, the current of filial affection, the noblest flame next to divine love, is frozen to ice as it proceeds from the heart.

If such a line of conduct be pursued, it will be impossible to avoid at all times a dilemma from which mere address and prevarication will not be sufficient to extricate the child. A plain question, it may be unintentional, will require a plain answer. The truth it dares not tell, and a falsehood is substituted. Conscience, which slept whilst partial statements and prevarications served to deceive, now feels itself wounded a little. And is this salutary wound deepened by the reproof of that only parent who knows the sin? No, this she cannot do because an acknowledgment of the truth would have involved herself in censure. Thus she is obliged to connive at sin.

Let us follow the youth up into life who has thus been early taught to dissemble. No wonder if truth becomes a stranger in his heart, and insincerity and deceit become his constant companions. And it is very likely that his parents will have to reap the fruit of their own doings.

A vain and sinful mind will seek its proper aliment in pernicious books, such as novels, plays, and romances. These may have been prohibited by the parent, but they will be obtained by the same system of deception, concealed and read, perhaps at those seasons when it was hoped they were reading the Scriptures and calling upon God. The theatre and places of amusement will be visited, while some excuse will be framed to blind the eyes of an afflicted and anxious parent. Improper, and even dangerous connections, will be formed clandestinely, while the parent is deceived by contrary assurances till, perhaps, it is too late, and the most distressing and afflictive consequences ensue.

Those who have been accustomed to make observations of the state of society among us, will not, I am persuaded, say, that I have overcharged the picture which I have now drawn. I am fully convinced that the most enormous evils flow from the source which I have now endeavoured to lay open.

I would, therefore, most earnestly recommend to parents as they value the moral and religious character of their offspring, to be of one mind in their tuition and discipline. Should they on any subject have different views, let that be to themselves. Before their children, let them always act as with one council, one heart. Rather suffer any inconvenience, than have recourse to concealment and deception. Duplicity on your part will almost to a certainty ensure the want of sincerity in your child.

If on any occasion you should discover a propensity in your offspring to depart from truth and sincerity, let it meet with your marked disapprobation. Read to them the awful account of Ananias and Sapphira, who were struck dead by the judgment of God, for telling an untruth. Let them hear, out of the sacred volume, that the God of truth abhors deceivers. And that all "liars shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone."

Encourage them, as much as possible, to speak the truth. If they have done anything deserving of blame, and make a frank, open confession of it, let not that confession expose them to punishment, lest at another time they be tempted to hide it. Let your approbation of the temper that speaks the truth more than counterbalance your disapprobation of the error they had committed.

Should you succeed, under the divine blessing, in forming the minds of your dear children to the love of truth and sincerity, the hatred of fraud and dissimulation, you will have laid the basis of a character, which, heightened and improved by the graces of God's Holy Spirit, will be lovely in the eyes of heaven, and eminently useful among the sons of men.

