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of
George Whitefield

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Sermons

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THE
W O R K S

OF THE REVEREND

GEORGE WHITEFIELD, M. A.

Late of PEMBROKE-COLLEGE, OXFORD,
And Chaplain to The Rt. Hon. the Countess of HUNTINGDON.

CONTAINING

All his SERMONS and TRACTS
Which have been already published:

WITH

A SELECT COLLECTION of
LETTERS,

Written to his most intimate Friends, and Persons of Distinction, in
England, Scotland, Ireland, and America, from the Year 1734 to 1770,
including the whole Period of his Ministry.

ALSO

Some other PIECES on IMPORTANT SUBJECTS,
never before printed; prepared by Himself for the Press.

To which is prefixed,

An ACCOUNT of his LIFE,
Compiled from his Original PAPERS and LETTERS.

VOLUME VI.

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SERMON XXXII.

A Penitent Heart, The Best *New Year's Gift*.

LUKE 13:3.

Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

When we consider how heinous and aggravating our offences are in the sight of a just and holy GOD, that they bring down his wrath upon our heads, and occasion us to live under his indignation; how ought we thereby to be deterred from evil, or at least engaged to study to repent thereof, and not commit the same again; but man is so thoughtless of an eternal state, and has so little consideration of the welfare of his immortal soul, that he can sin without any thought that he must give an account of his actions at the day of judgement; or if he, at times, has any reflections on his behaviour, they do not drive him to true repentance: he may, for a short time, refrain from falling into some gross sins which he had lately committed; but then, when the temptation comes again with power, he is carried away with the lust; and thus he goes on promising and resolving, and in breaking both his resolutions and his promises, as fast almost as he has made them. This is highly offensive to GOD, it is mocking of him. My brethren, when grace is given us to repent truly, we shall turn wholly unto GOD; and let me beseech you to repent of your sins, for the time is hastening when you will have neither time nor call to repent; there is none in the grave, whither we are going; but do not be afraid, for GOD often receives the greatest sinner to mercy through the merits of

CHRIST JESUS; this magnifies the riches of his free grace; and should be an encouragement for you, who are great and notorious sinners, to repent, for he will have mercy upon you, if you through CHRIST return unto him.

St *Paul* was an eminent instance of this: he speaks of himself as “the chief of sinners,” and he declares how GOD showed mercy unto him. CHRIST loves to show mercy unto sinners, and if you repent, he will have mercy upon you. But as no word is more mistaken than that of repentance, I shall,

- I. Show you what the nature of repentance is.
- II. Consider the several parts and causes of repentance.
- III. I shall give you some reasons, why repentance is necessary to salvation. And,
- IV. Exhort all of you, high and low, rich and poor, one with another, to endeavour after repentance.

I. Repentance, my brethren, in the first place, as to its nature, is the carnal and corrupt disposition of men being changed into a renewed and sanctified disposition. A man that has truly repented, is truly regenerated: it is a different word for one and the same thing; the motley mixture of the beast and devil is gone; there is, as it were, a new creation wrought in your hearts. If your repentance is true, you are renewed throughout, both in soul and body; your understandings are enlightened with the knowledge of GOD, and of the LORD JESUS CHRIST; and your wills, which were stubborn, obstinate, and hated all good, are obedient and conformable to the will of GOD. Indeed, our deists tell us, that man now has a free will to do good, to love GOD, and to repent when he will; but indeed, there is no free will in any of you, but to sin; nay, your free will leads you so far, that you would, if possible, pull GOD from his throne. This may, perhaps, offend the Pharisees, but (it is the truth in CHRIST which I speak, I lie not) every man by his own natural will hates GOD; but when he is turned unto the LORD by evangelical repentance, then his will is changed; then your consciences, now hardened and benumbed, shall be quickened and awakened;

then your hard hearts shall be melted, and your unruly affections shall be crucified. Thus, by that repentance, the whole soul will be changed, you will have new inclinations, new desires, and new habits.

You may see how vile we are by nature, that it requires so great a change to be made upon us, to recover us from this state of sin, and therefore the consideration of our dreadful state should make us earnest with GOD to change our condition, and that change, true repentance implies; therefore, my brethren, consider how hateful your ways are to GOD, while you continue in sin; how abominable you are unto him, while you run into evil: you cannot be said to be Christians while you are hating CHRIST, and his people; true repentance will entirely change you, the bias of your souls will be changed, then you will delight in GOD, in CHRIST, in his law, and in his people; you will then believe that there is such a thing as inward feeling, though now you may esteem it madness and enthusiasm; you will not then be ashamed of becoming fools for CHRIST'S sake; you will not regard being scoffed at; it is not then their pointing after you and crying, "Here comes another troop of his followers," will dismay you; no, your soul will abhor such proceedings, the ways of CHRIST and his people will be your whole delight.

It is the nature of such repentance to make a change, and the greatest change as can be made here in the soul. Thus you see what repentance implies in its own nature; it denotes an abhorrence of all evil, and a forsaking of it. I shall now proceed,

Secondly, To show you the parts of it, and the causes concurring thereto.

The parts are, sorrow, hatred, and an entire forsaking of sin.

Our sorrow and grief for sin, must not spring merely from a fear of wrath; for if we have no other ground but that, it proceeds from self-love, and not from any love to GOD; and if love to GOD is not the chief motive of your repentance, your repentance is in vain, and not to be esteemed true.

Many, in our days, think their crying, GOD forgive me! or, LORD have mercy upon me! or I am sorry for it! is repentance, and that GOD will esteem it as such: but, indeed, they are mistaken; it is not the drawing near to GOD with our lips, while our hearts are far from him, which he regards. Repentance does not come by fits and starts; no, it is one continued act of our lives; for as we daily commit sin, so we need a daily repentance before GOD, to obtain forgiveness for those sins we commit.

It is not your confessing yourselves to be sinners, it is not knowing your condition to be sad and deplorable, so long as you continue in your sins; your care and endeavours should be, to get the heart thoroughly affected therewith, that you may feel yourselves to be lost and undone creatures, for CHRIST came to save such as are lost; and if you are enabled to groan under the weight and burden of your sins, then CHRIST will ease you and give you rest.

And till you are thus sensible of your misery and lost condition, you are a servant to sin and to your lusts, under the bondage and command of Satan, doing his drudgery: thou art under the curse of GOD, and liable to his judgement. Consider how dreadful thy state will be at death, and after the day of judgement, when thou wilt be exposed to such miseries which the ear hath not heard, neither can the heart conceive, and that to all eternity, if you die impenitent.

But I hope better things of you, my brethren, though I thus speak, and things which accompany salvation; go to GOD in prayer, and be earnest with him, that by his Spirit he would convince you of your miserable condition by nature, and make you truly sensible thereof. O be humbled, be humbled, I beseech you, for your sins! Having spent so many years in sinning, what canst thou do less, than be concerned to spend some hours in mourning and sorrowing for the same, and be humbled before GOD?

Look back into your lives, call to mind thy sins, as many as possibly thou canst, the sins of thy youth, as well as of thy riper years; see how you have departed from a gracious Father, and wandered in the way of wickedness, in which you have lost

yourselves, the favour of GOD, the comforts of his Spirit, and the peace of your own consciences; then go and beg pardon of the LORD, through the blood of the Lamb, for the evil thou hast committed, and for the good thou hast omitted. Consider, likewise, the heinousness of thy sins; see what very aggravating circumstances thy sins are attended with, how you have abused the patience of GOD, which should have led you to repentance; and when thou findest thy heart hard, beg of GOD to soften it, cry mightily unto him, and he will take away thy stony heart, and give thee a heart of flesh.

Resolve to leave all thy sinful lusts and pleasures; renounce, forsake, and abhor, thy old sinful course of life, and serve GOD in holiness and righteousness all the remaining part of life. If you lament and bewail past sins, and do not forsake them, your repentance is in vain, you are mocking of GOD, and deceiving your own soul; you must put off the old man, with his deeds, before you can put on the new man, CHRIST JESUS.

You, therefore, who have been swearers and cursers, you, who have been harlots and drunkards, you, who have been thieves and robbers, you, who have hitherto followed the sinful pleasures and diversions of life, let me beseech you, by the mercies of GOD in CHRIST JESUS, that you would no longer continue therein, but that you would forsake your evil ways, and turn unto the LORD, for he waiteth to be gracious unto you, he is ready, he is willing, to pardon you of all your sins; but do not expect CHRIST to pardon you of sin, when you run into it, and will not abstain from complying with the temptations; but, if you will be persuaded to abstain from evil and choose the good, to return unto the LORD, and repent of your wickedness, he hath promised he will abundantly pardon you, he will heal your backslidings, and will love you freely. Resolve now this day to have done with your sins for ever; let your old ways and you be separated; you must resolve against it, for there can be no true repentance without a resolution to forsake it. Resolve for CHRIST, resolve against the devil and his works, and go on fighting the LORD's battles against the devil and his emissaries; attack him in the strongest holds he has, fight him as men, as

Christians, and you will soon find him to be a coward; resist him, and he will fly from you. Resolve, through grace, to do this, and your repentance is half done: but then take care that you do not ground your resolutions on your own strength, but in the strength of the LORD JESUS CHRIST; he is the way, he is the truth, and he is the life; without his assistance you can do nothing, but through his grace strengthening thee, thou wilt be enabled to do all things; and the more thou art sensible of thy own weakness and inability, the more ready CHRIST will be to help thee; and what can all the men of the world do to thee when CHRIST is for thee? Thou wilt not regard what they say against thee, for thou wilt have the testimony of a good conscience.

Resolve to cast thyself at the feet of CHRIST in subjection to him, and throw thyself into the arms of CHRIST for salvation by him. Consider, my dear brethren, the many invitations he has given you to come unto him, to be saved by him; GOD has “laid on him the iniquity of us all.” O let me prevail with you, above all things, to make choice of the LORD JESUS CHRIST, resign yourselves unto him, take him, O take him upon his own terms; and whosoever thou art, how great a sinner soever thou hast been, this evening, in the name of the great GOD do I offer JESUS CHRIST unto thee; as thou valuest thy life and soul, refuse him not, but stir up thyself to accept of the LORD JESUS, take him wholly as he is, for he will be applied wholly unto you, or else not at all. JESUS CHRIST must be your whole wisdom, JESUS CHRIST must be your whole righteousness, JESUS CHRIST must be your whole sanctification, or he will never be your eternal redemption.

What though you have been ever so wicked and profligate, yet if you will now abandon your sins, and turn unto the LORD JESUS CHRIST, thou shalt have him given to thee, and all thy sins shall be freely forgiven. O why will you neglect the great work of your repentance? Do not defer the doing of it one day longer, but to-day, even now, take that CHRIST who is freely offered to you.

Now, as to the *causes* hereof, the first cause is GOD; he is the author, “we are born of GOD,” GOD hath begotten us, even GOD,

the Father of our LORD JESUS CHRIST; it is he that stirs us up to will and to do of his own good pleasure: and another cause is, GOD's free grace; it is owing to the "riches of his free grace," my brethren, that we have been prevented from going down to hell long ago; it is because the compassions of the LORD fail not, they are new every morning, and fresh every evening.

Sometimes the instruments are very unlikely: a poor despised minister or member of JESUS CHRIST, may, by the power of GOD, be made an instrument in the hands of GOD, of bringing you to true evangelical repentance; and this may be done, to show that the power is not in men, but that it is entirely owing to the good pleasure of GOD; and if there has been any good done among any of you, by preaching the word, as I trust there has, though it were preached in a field, if GOD has met and owned us, and blessed his word, though preached by an enthusiastic babbler, a boy, a madman; I do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice, let foes say what they will. I shall now,

Thirdly, Show the reasons why repentance is necessary to salvation.

And this, my brethren, is plainly revealed to us in the word of GOD, "The soul that does not repent and turn unto the LORD, shall die in its sins, and their blood shall be required at their own heads." It is necessary, as we have sinned, we should repent: for a holy GOD could not, nor ever can, or will, admit any thing that is unholy into his presence: this is the beginning of grace in the soul; there must be a change in heart and life, before there can be a dwelling with a holy GOD. You cannot love sin and GOD too, you cannot love GOD and Mammon; no unclean person can stand in the presence of GOD, it is contrary to the holiness of his nature; there is a contrariety between the holy nature of GOD, and the unholy nature of carnal and unregenerate men.

What communication can there be between a sinless GOD, and creatures full of sin, between a pure GOD, and impure creatures? If you were to be admitted into heaven, with your present tempers, in your impenitent condition, heaven itself

would be a hell to you; the songs of angels would be as enthusiasm, and would be intolerable to you; therefore you must have these tempers changed, you must be holy as GOD is: he must be your GOD here, and you must be his people, or you will never dwell together to all eternity. If you hate the ways of GOD, and cannot spend an hour in his service, how will you think to be easy to all eternity, in singing praises to him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever.

And this is to be the employment, my brethren, of all those who are admitted into this glorious place, where neither sin nor sinner is admitted, where no scoffer ever can come, without repentance from his evil ways, a turning unto GOD, and a cleaving unto him: this must be done, before any can be admitted into the glorious mansions of GOD, which are prepared for all that love the LORD JESUS CHRIST in sincerity and truth: repent ye then of all your sins. O my dear brethren, it makes my blood run cold, in thinking that any of you should not be admitted into the glorious mansions above. O that it were in my power, I would place all of you, yea, you my scoffing brethren, and the greatest enemy I have on earth, at the right hand of JESUS; but this I cannot do: however, I advise and exhort you, with all love and tenderness, to make JESUS your refuge; fly to him for relief; JESUS died to save such as you; he is full of compassion; and if you go to him, as poor, lost, undone sinners, JESUS will give you his Spirit; you shall live and reign, and reign and live, you shall love and live, and live and love with this JESUS to all eternity.

I am, *Fourthly*, to exhort all of you, high and low, rich and poor, one with another, to repent of all your sins, and turn unto the LORD.

And I shall speak to each of you; for you have either repented, or you have not, you are believers in CHRIST JESUS, or unbelievers.

And first, you who never have truly repented of your sins, and never have truly forsaken your lusts, be not offended if I speak plain to you; for it is love, love to your souls, that constrains me to speak: I shall lay before you your danger, and the misery to which you are exposed, while you remain impenitent in sin.

And O that this may be a means of making you fly to CHRIST for pardon and forgiveness.

While thy sins are not repented of, thou art in danger of death; and if you should die, you would perish for ever. There is no hope of any who live and die in their sins, but that they will dwell with devils and damned spirits to all eternity. And how do we know we shall live much longer? We are not sure of seeing our own habitations this night in safety. What mean ye then being at ease and pleasure while your sins are not pardoned? As sure as ever the word of GOD is true, if you die in that condition, you are shut out of all hope and mercy for ever, and shall pass into easeless and endless misery.

What is all thy pleasures and diversions worth? They last but for a moment, they are of no worth, and but of short continuance. And sure it must be gross folly, eagerly to pursue those sinful lusts and pleasures, which war against the soul, which tend to harden the heart, and keep us from closing with the LORD JESUS; indeed, these are destructive of our peace here and, without repentance, will be of our peace hereafter.

O the folly and madness of this sensual world; sure if there were nothing in sin but present slavery, it would keep an ingenuous spirit from it. But to do the devil's drudgery! And if we do that, we shall have his wages, which is eternal death and condemnation; O consider this, my guilty brethren, you that think it no crime to swear, whore, drink, or scoff and jeer at the people of GOD; consider how your voices will then be changed, and you, that counted their lives madness, and their end without honour, shall howl and lament at your own madness and folly, that should bring you to so much woe and distress! Then you will lament and bemoan your own dreadful condition: but it will be of no signification; for he that is now your merciful Saviour, will then become your inexorable Judge. Now he is easy to be entreated; but then, all your tears and prayers will be in vain: for GOD hath allotted to every man a day of grace, a time of repentance, which, if he does not improve, but neglects and despises the means which are offered to him, he cannot be saved.

Consider, therefore, while you are going on in a course of sin and unrighteousness, I beseech you, my brethren, to think of the consequence that will attend your thus misspending your precious time; your souls are worth being concerned about: for if you can enjoy all the pleasures and diversions of life, at death you must leave them; that will put an end to all your worldly concerns. And will it not be very deplorable, to have your good things here, all your earthly, sensual, devilish pleasures, which you have been so much taken up with, all over: and the thought for how trifling a concern thou hast lost eternal welfare, will gnaw thy very soul.

Thy wealth and grandeur will stand in no stead; thou canst carry nothing of it into the other world: then the consideration of thy uncharitableness to the poor, and the ways thou didst take to obtain thy wealth, will be a very hell unto thee.

Now you enjoy the means of grace, as the preaching of his word, prayer, and sacraments; and GOD has sent his ministers out into the fields and highways, to invite, to woo you to come in; but they are tiresome to thee, thou hadst rather be at thy pleasures: ere long, my brethren, they will be over, and you will be no more troubled with them; but then thou wouldest give ten thousand worlds for one moment of that merciful time of grace which thou hast abused; then you will cry for a drop of that precious blood which now you trample under your feet; then you will wish for one more offer of mercy, for CHRIST and his free grace to be offered to you again; but your crying will be in vain: for as you would not repent here, GOD will not give you an opportunity to repent hereafter; if you would not in CHRIST'S time, you shall not in your own. In what a dreadful condition will you then be? What horror and astonishment will possess your souls? Then all thy lies and oaths, thy scoffs and jeers, at the people of GOD, all thy filthy and unclean thoughts and actions, thy misspent time in balls, plays, and assemblies, thy spending whole evenings at cards, dice, and masquerades, thy frequenting of taverns and alehouses, thy worldliness, covetousness, and thy uncharitableness, will be brought at once to thy remembrance, and at once charged upon thy guilty soul.