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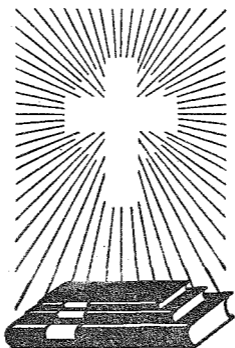
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# REPENTANCE

BY ELBERT A. SMITH

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# REPENTANCE

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*Text.*—“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel.”—Mark 1: 15.

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## *Analysis of the Text*

The message quoted is exceedingly personal and imminent. The time to repent is *now*: “The time is fulfilled.” The place is *here*: “The kingdom is at hand.” You are the person: “Repent, ye, and believe the gospel.” There are few men indeed who do not need to heed this admonition.

The message of the Lord comes to us first in invitation: “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”—Acts 3: 19.

It comes to us next in warning: “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”—Luke 13: 3.

## *The Nature of Repentance*

There is a form of worldly repentance which consists merely in being

sorry when one is caught. The individual is not sorry that he did wrong. He is sorry that he is caught and is to be punished. That is the kind of repentance that Paul had in mind when he said, "The sorrow of the world worketh death."—2 Corinthians 7: 10.

That kind of repentance worketh death because all it does is to cause the individual to make up his mind that next time he will sin, but he will be more careful. From this state of mind has been evolved the worldly philosophy: "If you can't be good, be *careful*." The end of this philosophy is death, because man cannot escape consequences. Whatsoever a man soweth, that also shall he reap.

Then there is a godly repentance that Paul had in mind when he said, "Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation."—2 Corinthians 7: 10. This repentance is sorrow for sin and not for exposure. It will "bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance."—Matthew 3: 8.

This repentance will cause a man to "Cease to do evil" (Isaiah 1: 16), and to "learn to do well" (Isaiah 1: 17).

This repentance leads to restitution wherever it is possible to make right that which was wrong. As an ex-

ample, Zaccheus stated that when he had taken anything from any man by fraud he had returned fourfold. (Luke 19: 8.)

### *The Objective*

The first objective of repentance is to get right with God. The admonition in 2 Corinthians 5: 20 is, "Be ye reconciled to God."

The old confessions of faith that stated that Jesus Christ was made manifest in the flesh that he might reconcile God to man were entirely wrong. As one has said, "When a man's watch is wrong he does not set the sun by the watch, he sets the watch by the sun." The creeds may have attempted to adjust God to man, but the mission of Christ was to reconcile man to God. Faith and repentance are essential steps in this reconciliation.

The next objective of repentance is to get right with one's fellow men. It is truly said that it takes three to live the Christian religion—a man, his God, and his fellow man. That is the "eternal triangle," and fellowship must flow from every point.

The objective of repentance is greatly aided by confession.

## *Story of the Prodigal Son*

In the 15th chapter of Luke we have the great and beautiful story of the prodigal son. Without doubt Jesus meant this story to represent God the Father and his erring children.

We note first the attitude of the son. He was blind with folly. No one could reason with him and he would not profit by any man's experience.

He yielded to the lure of "the far country." That far country today may be under the great white lights of New York, or in the vice district of Chicago, or it may be just around the corner in some low den where men gather to drink and play cards and exchange evil stories, or where sinful women assemble. It is a "far country" in the sense that it is far from our Father's house and from the teaching of that mother who is praying for her wayward son or daughter.

Next came the disillusionment of the prodigal son when his fortune was squandered. He discovered then, as many men do, that those who seemed to be his friends had deserted him.

Next the prodigal "came to him-

self." He returned to reason. He became exceedingly humble and truly repentant, and returned to his father saying, "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and I am no more worthy to be called thy son: Make me as one of thy hired servants."—Luke 15:18, 19.

Now notice the attitude of the father. Never at any time had he cast the son off. This represents the attitude of God, of whom it is said, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." He was always filled with love and compassion for man.

When the prodigal son returned, he was received with joy. The father ran to meet him and kissed him and said: "This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

In like manner we are told that there is joy in heaven over one repentant sinner. (Luke 15:10.)

The results were that the son made a new start. He started from where he was. Some one has offered the trite saying that if you would go anywhere "you must start from where you are." The prodigal son did not have a good place to start from. He started from the pig sty. But he found himself there. He was

willing to make the start and return to his father's house.

Are you ready for a new start? Start now; start right.

### *The Lesson of the Gospel Mirror*

In the first chapter of James the gospel is compared to a mirror. Some men look into it and immediately go away and forget what manner of men they are; but he who looks into it and heeds the lesson is compared to the man who is not merely a hearer of the word, but also a doer. Are you content to *listen* to the word of God alone, or do you wish to *do* the will of God?

The mirror serves a double purpose. It shows us what we are, and so arouses a divine discontent. It shows us what we may be, and so points the way to salvation, or as Paul says, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory."—2 Corinthians 3: 18.

### *The Good and Bad in Men*

There is good and bad in all men. Whittier wrote about the "two voices" that held debate within him. Tennyson wrote of the "moods" that

struggle within man. Paul complained of the evil that was "ever present" with him when he would do good.

The human soul is a battlefield. The moral struggle distinguishes man from the animals and vegetables. It is the province of the gospel to kill the beast in man and redeem the man.

Repentance is one of the first steps towards God and towards that clean, true life, which means salvation.

It is one of the six vital, fundamental, gospel principles. Others of these principles will be discussed in this series of tracts.

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