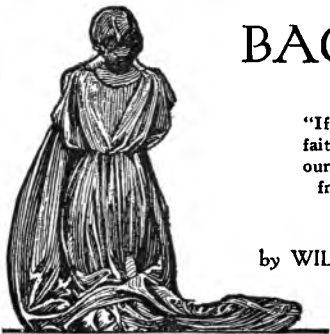


The SINNER'S WAY BACK TO GOD



"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

by WILLIAM A. WESTWORTH

WERE you ever thoroughly discouraged at your own personal outlook? Has it ever seemed as though there were no further use in trying to win the victory over sin? Have you felt that you were too far gone on the downward path to retrace your steps? Has the future held out no hope for you, and were only failure and loss indicated? Have you had such abhorrence of your own weakness before temptation, that you decided there could be no relief for you, and salvation was beyond your grasp? Disheartened and worn, have you heard the enemy whispering to you that there was no chance for you, and that you might as well give up the fight, for God would not receive you; that your case was hopeless? In your misery, gloom, despondency, heartache, have you felt that there was nothing you would not do, no price you would not pay, if you could but get relief? Have you experienced such soul-crushing pressure of sin, that you would gladly relinquish anything, everything, if only you could find release and know you were accepted of God?

God Is Troubling Your Conscience

Then, when you were about to yield in the struggle and give up in despair, have you somehow been halted? And have there been whispered to you questions that have brought a wondrous change and sent a glimmer of hope through the gloom? "Who is it that is troubling you?" "Would Satan thus worry you if you really had sinned away your day of grace?" "Is it the prac-

tice of the enemy to worry about sin those who might by his agitation be led to repent and get right with God?" "Can it be that it is the Spirit of God leading you to a realization of your lost condition, in the hope that such realization will cause you to turn to the only source of help to which a sinner can come?" Yes, these are the queries that force their way into the deeper recesses of the soul, and amid the very hopelessness of despair, start burning a flame which, if heeded and responded to, will soon fire us with a new courage, a growing hope, a strong determination to turn right about, and which will bring us to rest and peace as we surrender all to Christ.

And so "the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." We are called to retrace our steps, through contrition of soul, self-abhorrence, self-abnegation, and the repudiation of all our former confidences. Thus along a rugged way, we are led to repentance. God by His Spirit is calling the prodigal home again, and is trying to reveal to us the only way whereby we can enter into covenant relations with Him and rest in His love. So weak we are, so fraught with self-reliance, and then so readily discouraged, that only this leading of the Spirit can turn us back to Jesus and give us peace. What wondrous love of God, to grant us the woings of His Spirit to turn us from death to life again, after we have turned away from Him and followed our own way!

True Repentance Comes Not from Fear

Thus drawn toward repentance, with heart yearning for God, with soul crying for pardon, with an overwhelming desire to be free from the bondage of sin, we turn to God; and though it seems like hoping against hope, we exclaim like the publican of old, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Or we reëcho the words of the prodigal, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in Thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son." We can but throw ourselves upon His mercy, implore His forgiveness, claim His promise, and trust. And in our determination to let go the past, and if possible, get right with God, we allow nothing to stand in the way of acceptance, hoping that God will hear our cry, and in His love, reach down and lift us up. We are ready to retrace any step; to bare our soul in the effort to get clean again; to make restitution for any wrong done to another; to pay whatever price is demanded by God, that our rebellion

may be rectified, and we be where the blessing of Heaven may rest upon us. This is repentance.

Repentance is not a fearful cringing as we contemplate the wages of sin, nor a shrinking from the just rewards of waywardness; it is not a cowardly retreat from a way that we long to travel, but for fear of consequences, do not dare go on. Repentance is a reversal of one's own way because that way is wrong; it is a determination to be right, to be in harmony with God's revealed will, irrespective of results, temporal or eternal. Many may consider repentance a mere change of front occasioned by fear of punishment. It really springs from an abhorrence of sin and a sincere desire to be in harmony with the divine.

Nothing Held Back in True Confession

Repentance never makes any allowance for any continuance in sin under any circumstances whatsoever. It does not claim exemption because of supposed hereditary weaknesses. It makes a clean breast of every wrong, and claims acceptance through the merits of "the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world."

The truly repentant holds back nothing in confession. The soul is bared before God. No excuses are offered. No blame is attached to another to condone our own waywardness. We cannot try to rise on the weakness of others. We simply acknowledge our own iniquity, without in any way involving as a factor of our failure the transgressions of others. True confession is specific. Generalities cannot suffice. "This evil," said the psalmist, referring definitely to his sin in the matter of Uriah, was done "in Thy sight." He did not try to plead the general frailty of the race. To do this is but an attempt to shuffle the blame; and in thus doing, we cannot get the personal response which the heart weighted down with sin so deeply craves. As the Spirit of God brings to our minds the individual sins that have separated us from our heavenly Father, these will be confessed, and we will take the blame, without thought of the condemnation of others, even though they may be equally culpable.

And it is a blessed thing to know that God will only reveal to us our sins as we are strong enough to put them away. He will not show us all our weaknesses at once, or we should be entirely discouraged, and feel that there was no use for us to try. But day by day, as we get the victory over one sin, His Spirit will

show us more, so that we can again make the wrong right, and day by day be conquerors in His name. Were we to see ourselves in all the heinousness that the character of God would reveal in us, the contrast between the two would be so great that we would not have courage to press on. Hence He leads us step by step, as we are able to bear it.

Confess to Fellow Men We Have Wronged

But true confession goes farther than the recital to God of our sins. Not only will we be ready to tell the story of our failures to Him, but, if sincerely repentant, we will also go to our neighbor or friend, our companion, our father or mother, brother or sister, even to our child, and tell them also of what a failure we have made in not rightly representing the Christ life, and ask their forgiveness wherein we have wronged them, pleading with them for the help they can render to us, to aid us to walk aright in the future.

Too often this course is spoiled by an implied indictment. How easy to say, in justification of our course, "If you had not done this or that, I would not have done as I did." Thus we try to transfer the blame, and often do more harm than good. True repentance and acceptable confession make no reference to the faults of others, but in owning our wrong, and asking forgiveness, really do more to melt down hard feeling, and to restore confidence in the validity of our repentance, than anything else could do.

Many think that a general confession will cover all their wrongdoings. To make a public statement that one has done wrong and is sorry, and hopes that any who have been wronged will forgive, is neither advisable nor effective. Only when a wrong has been done to a community, a church congregation, or any other aggregation of individuals, need a confession be made thus openly. It is to God or to the individual wronged that the penitent should go, and make right each wrong committed; and this must be done with a specific acknowledgment of the fault.

But simply to confess our wrongs, even though this confession may be full and complete, does not satisfy all the demands of true repentance. Repentance always makes restitution for the wrong done to others. If there has been any material loss inflicted, this loss should be restored. The Scriptural exaction of

"an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," indicates the essentiality of restitution; and restitution attests the genuineness of our repentance.

Forgiveness Absolutely Sure to the Repentant

When we have thus repented and confessed, realizing that without pardon we are altogether undone and lost, how blessed the assurance that "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins"! It makes no difference how far we have wandered. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." He draws no line to preclude the vilest sinner. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." It is not for us to argue that God will not forgive. It is not for us to philosophize as to the efficacy of repentance or confession. We must simply believe; and in this simple acceptance of His word lies the victory. We have His own promise, and that cannot fail. "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? . . . Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. . . . Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Ezekiel 18: 23-31.

The heart of the Eternal yearns for His wandering children. It is not with a desire for vengeance that He beholds our wanderings, but with tender compassion. He longs for us to turn away from that which must ultimately yield death. And His willingness to forgive and to save even "to the uttermost" could be evidenced in no greater way than in the gift of His only-begotten Son to be a substitute for us in the bearing of the penalty of sin.

God Loves to Forgive

"He delighteth in mercy." He loves to forgive the repentant sinner. He yearns to have the wanderer return. He sends His Spirit to invite this return. The goodness of God leads us to repentance. He tells us that He has stretched His hands out

all the day, pleading with His children to return to His fold. How many have regarded Him as a supreme dictator, holding to exact account the steps of every child! How many have feared Him and His power to punish sin! O that all might know Him as He is! To comprehend God as one whose full desire is to bring joy to every creature of His hand; to realize that "with His whole heart and with His whole soul," He is striving to lead us, each one, through to life eternal; to recognize that in the gift of Jesus, our Father "went the limit" in the proving of His desire to save each erring son,—this will make repentance a pleasure, in that it will bring us to a conscious communion with Him.

And to the soul that has been bowed down with the weight of sin, and that has looked into the future only to see gloom and black despair, is there any more blessed word than "forgiven"? To know that pardon is ours; to know that we stand without fault before the throne of God, accepted in the Beloved; to realize that a divine sacrifice has been made for our sins, and that "by grace ye are saved,"—surely this is rest and peace and joy. And when the way has been cleared; when we know that we have put away every sin that has stood between us and a free intercourse with our Lord; when we have the assurance of His Spirit that we are accepted of Him and that we stand fully reconciled to our God,—how easy will be the rest of the way! Self has been removed; nothing hinders a full obedience to His revealed will. What He says, we will do. Where He sends, we will go. Constantly guided by His mind, we breathe out as the ruling sentiment of our lives the prayer of our Saviour uttered in the most trying moment of His life on earth, "Not My will, but Thine, be done."

And thus repentance, confession, and forgiveness pave the way for the experiencing of the higher life. Bringing us into covenant relationship with our Lord, they place us where He can whisper peace; where He can take us by the hand and lead us safely on to ultimate victory.

Repentance and Confession Not Debasing

Because of all this, instead of regarding repentance as an experience that is difficult and soul-harrowing, we must look beyond the immediate pain and humiliation, beyond the shame and mortification that come to us when we realize how far we

have wandered from the right, beyond the necessity of forsaking what may have been to us habits of pleasure in sin; we must see the opening of the new way, the shining of the brighter experience in Christ, the victory that is to be ours instead of the failures that have weighed us down in the past. The struggles that must invariably accompany true repentance and the forsaking of the past are but the heralds of the victorious life. The sacrifices that must needs be made in the forsaking of the pleasures of sin and habits of selfishness are but the opening of the door to the treasures of love in Christ Jesus. Repentance and confession, while they may be galling and bitter, are by no means debasing. It takes real courage and manliness to acknowledge our wrongs; and instead of belittling us, confession makes us stronger, bigger, brighter, for God.

And only those who have been willing to humble themselves before God and man, can stretch out the helping hand to those about them who have slipped and fallen.

It is when we ourselves have found the way to the loving Saviour, that we can direct others to Him. As we appreciate what has been done for us as He has forgiven and accepted us, we are able to point the way to hope and light, to confession and forgiveness, to the glorious change from condemnation to the triumphant life where Jesus lives and works in us.

So may our praises constantly go forth to our Lord, who, though we had wandered so far from Him, sent His Holy Spirit to woo us back; whose loving-kindness led us to repentance; whose tender mercy granted us full pardon; whose heart held back nothing, but gave all, that we might in Him find life and have it more abundantly.

Here are a few of God's great promises on repentance, confession, and forgiveness, that will help to do a thorough work of getting back to God:

<i>Repentance</i>	<i>Confession</i>	<i>Forgiveness</i>
Deuteronomy 4: 29	Job 9: 20	Exodus 34: 6
2 Chronicles 7: 14	Job 13: 23	Psalm 32: 1, 2, 5
Job 11: 13	Job 42: 5	Psalm 99: 8
Psalm 34: 18	Psalm 32: 5	Psalm 103: 12
Psalm 51: 17	Psalm 40: 11	Isaiah 1: 18
Psalm 147: 3	Psalm 51: 2-5	Isaiah 43: 25, 26
Isaiah 55: 6, 7	Isaiah 64: 5-7	Jeremiah 31: 34
Isaiah 57: 15	Jeremiah 3: 21-25	Hebrews 8: 12
Joel 2: 12-18	Luke 15: 17-21	1 John 1: 7, 9
Proverbs 28: 13	1 John 1: 8-10	1 John 2: 1, 2, 12

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