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EDITORIAL.

REPENTANCE.

And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent, because He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised him from the dead.—Acts. xvii. 30, 31.

The subject of repentance is one which deeply concerns every living man, inasmuch as God commands all men everywhere to repent. It is one of those universal commands so completely embracing all mankind that no human being can escape from it. "All have sinned." "There is none that doeth good, no, not one." Opposite to these dismal facts stand the following: "That He (Jesus), by the grace of God should taste death for every man." "Who is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." The perfect cure is as universal as the disease. The command is to sinners, and for them and also embraces the whole so that none can possibly be left out. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." This leaves no sinner out. The same is true of God's command to all men to repent. It means every human being. Jesus found the world in morals, a *unity*, and as such He died for it. After His resurrection He sent the gospel to the world as a *unity*. The Jews who held mistaken views of their connection to Abraham could not see this. Nor can men who now hold mistaken views of election see it. The Jews thought they saw a *difference* between Jews and Gentiles before they heard the Gospel; the others think they see a *difference* between the elect and the non-elect before these hear the gospel. But the voice of justice, and truth and God's word, declares, "There is no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Being justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," etc., etc. (Rom. iii. 22, 23, 24).

It is after men hear the gospel that the separation takes place—a separation that will continue and be confirmed in the day of judgment. The gospel is God's power, and does not leave men as it finds them; for he who receives the gospel with all his heart receives the salvation which God sends in it to the lost, while he who despises and rejects the gospel, receives condemnation. Jesus was in earnest when He sent the gospel to every creature and declared, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark xvi. 15, 16).

Our attention is called to the division of time in the passage—the *past*, the *present* and the *future*. In the past, God winked at the ignorance of men. In the present, He commands all men to repent. In the future, He will judge the world righteously by Jesus Christ.

The past or "times of ignorance" was when men thought that the Godhead was like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. The religious creed of the philosophers of the wise city of Athens was about the following:

1st. We believe with our poet that we are all the offspring of the unknown God to whom we have an altar, and whom we worship as our creator.

2nd. We believe that skillful men can make God out of a piece of gold, or silver, or stone. 1st. God made these skillful men as well as us and then they made God of these materials. This, then, is what the wise men of this world know of God. We learn how men became so low as to hold such absurdities respecting the Creator "when they knew God they glorified Him not as God,

neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened." "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them up to a reprobate mind." (Rom. i. 21-28). Gross as was this ignorance, God suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. He sent no prophets among them, gave them none of His oracles, nor established His worship in their midst. All these privileges were confined to one small nation. These times lasted until the coming of Christ. Even when He was on earth and sent His apostles to preach the gospel of the kingdom, or the good news that the kingdom was at hand, He charged them not to go among the Gentiles nor the Samaritans, but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

The cross of Christ divides the past from the present. His death was the propitiation for the sins of the world. The love which prompted it burst all family and national barriers to reach the world. From the cross God speaks to all men everywhere. Jesus has been lifted up on it and will draw all men to him. He saves all who come to Him, and will draw to judgment all who refuse His grace. It was at the mouth of the conquered grave God said unto Him, "Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten Thee. Ask of Me and I will give Thee the heaven for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." From that hour Jesus claims all men as the purchase of His death. All who dispute a claim so just and good He will break in pieces as a potter's vessel. (Ps. ii) When Jesus sent His apostles into all the world with the gospel to all, it was on the ground that all power in heaven and on earth was given unto Him. And it is on the same ground that God now commands all men everywhere to repent.

Let us next enquire what is meant by the command to repent. We should certainly understand the command in order to obey it.

Some regard repentance as a godly sorrow or grief of heart that we have offended God. Under this impression many spend weeks, and months, and years, striving and praying for an amount of sorrow which seems indispensable to their salvation, but which they cannot obtain. We cannot by volition produce grief, or sorrow, or joy, or any other emotion of the mind, and to be directly commanded to have such emotions would leave us as helpless as if we were directly commanded to alter the pulsations of the heart or the secretions of the liver. But God commands men to repent because He knows they can repent.

Again, a mere sorrow from crime is useless. The inebriate is often deeply grieved at his folly when he becomes sober, but this does not keep him from the intoxicating cup when he meets it again. If repentance meant a grief of heart we could never tell how much grief would be necessary to obey the command of God, which leaves the mind in darkness and doubt.

Others, aware that sorrow for sin is not obeying the command to repent, understand it to mean a *reformation* or *amendment of life*, and even substitute these words for repentance. Many anxious persons have labored hard to produce this reformation or amendment of life, and at times flattered themselves with the thought that they were "new creatures," when a sudden return of old feelings and habits exposed their sandy foundation and renewed their disappointment.

Again, when the advocates of "faith alone" see that God commands men to repent as well as to believe, they conclude that faith and repentance are the same, which is another cause of bewilderment to anxious enquirers for salvation. Repentance is something peculiar to man while faith is not. Holy angels believe but do not repent. Lost angels believe but can never repent. But lost man both believes and repents.

We learn that repentance is a *heartfelt determina-*

tion to turn from sin to the service of God. This is what God now commands all men everywhere to do something that no one can do for another. Every man must do it for himself or perish. There is no one that knows he is doing wrong but can resolve to give it up, and resolve to do better when a better way is within his reach. A man may be very weak in carrying out that resolution, and others may help him, but others cannot make the resolution for him. God commands all men everywhere to make that solemn determination, and waits to give every man who obeys Him strength to carry out that determination, but will not make the determination for any man. He commands man to do it. This leaves the way clear before the eyes of every man who wants to be a Christian. He cannot directly control his emotions, but he can determine to do what God tells him to do. God will control his feelings and save him from sin and fit him for every good work when he believes and obeys Him. Godly sorrow leads to repentance, and repentance leads to reformation or a godly life. Man gets this godly sorrow by believing in the death of Jesus for his sins. God's goodness leads to repentance, and He never commanded all men to repent until He had displayed His goodness in giving His Son to die for every man. He gives every man who believes in Jesus a desire to repent and power to become a son of God. (John, i. 12).

Let us see how the New Testament treats of repentance. A certain man said to the first of his two sons: Go work to-day in my vineyard! He answered and said, I will not. But afterwards he repented and went. (Matt. xxi. 28-29). When told by his father to work, the purpose of his mind was so much against it that he positively refused. But afterwards he *changed that purpose and determined* to go and went. He did not repent by going but repented and went. Jesus gives a beautiful illustration of repentance in the case of the prodigal son. (Luke xv). It was the goodness of his father which led him to repentance. After he had spent all his substance in sin and was about to starve to death among strangers, he came to himself and thought of his father's wealth, and his father's love, and his own guilt and ruin, and he came to this *determination*, I will arise and go to my father and tell him all I have done against him and heaven. Jesus tells us how he carried out the *determination* and of his glad reception to show the joy among the angels over one sinner that repenteth. We see what a father's love and a son's sorrow led to—and what the *purpose of heart* led to in this case.

We read in Acts second, that the apostle Peter addressed the people with such power as to convince them that God had in heaven made the same Jesus whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ. When they heard this they were pricked in their hearts and said, Men and brethren, what shall we do. They were in deep sorrow when they asked, What shall we do? The first thing he told them was to repent. If he meant by that to have *godly sorrow* not one of them obeyed Him, for they *gladly* received His word. If he meant by it to *reform their lives* and be baptized, not one of them obeyed, for they did not wait to reform their lives. But if He meant to *determine* with all their heart to turn to God and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, they did obey Him by making that determination and being baptized. When they believed that Jesus whom they had crucified was now both Lord and Christ they had *godly sorrow*; when they determined to turn to God they had *repentance*; and when they were buried with Christ in baptism and rose to walk in newness of life, they had *reformation* or *amendment of life*.

When the church of Ephesus had left their first love, the faithful and true witness gave them three commands: 1st. Remember from whence thou art fallen. 2nd. Repent. 3rd. Do the first works. By obeying these they would have 1st. Godly sorrow. 2nd. Repentance. 3rd. Amendment of life. (Rev. ii. 5).

(To be continued.)