

**The Rev. CHARLES G. FINNEY'S
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LECTURE LIV.

REPENTANCE AND IMPENITENCE.

In the discussion of this subject I shall show,--

I. WHAT REPENTANCE IS NOT.

II. WHAT IT IS.

III. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN IT.

IV. WHAT IMPENITENCE IS NOT.

V. WHAT IT IS.

VI. SOME THINGS THAT ARE IMPLIED IN IMPENITENCE.

VII. NOTICE SOME OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OR EVIDENCES OF IMPENITENCE.

I. I am to show what repentance is not.

1. The Bible everywhere represents repentance as a virtue, and as constituting a change of moral character; consequently, it cannot be a phenomenon of the intelligence: that is, it cannot consist in conviction of sin, nor in any intellectual apprehension of our guilt or ill-desert. All the states or phenomena of the intelligence are purely passive states of mind, and of course moral character, strictly speaking, cannot be predicated of them.

2. Repentance is not a phenomenon of the sensibility: that is, it does not consist in a feeling of regret or remorse, of compunction or sorrow for sin, or of sorrow in view of the consequences of sin to self or to others, nor in any feelings or emotions whatever. All

feelings or emotions belong to the sensibility, and are, of course, purely passive states of mind, and consequently can have no moral character in themselves.

It should be distinctly understood, and always borne in mind, that repentance cannot consist in any involuntary state of mind, for it is impossible that moral character, strictly speaking, should pertain to passive states.

II. *What repentance is.*

There are two Greek words which are translated by the English word, repent.

1. *Metamelomai*, "to care for," or to be concerned for one's self; hence to change one's course. This term seems generally to be used to express a state of the sensibility, as regret, remorse, sorrow for sin, &c. But sometimes it also expresses a change of purpose as a consequence of regret, or remorse, or sorrow; as in Matt. xxi. 29, "He answered and said, I will not; but afterwards he repented and went." It is used to represent the repentance of Judas, which evidently consisted of remorse and despair.

2. *Metanoeo*, "to take an after view;" or more strictly, to change one's mind as a consequence of, and in conformity with, a second and more rational view of the subject. This word evidently expresses a change of choice, purpose, intention, in conformity with the dictates of the intelligence.

This is no doubt the idea of evangelical repentance. It is a phenomenon of will, and consists in the turning or change of the ultimate intention from selfishness to benevolence. The term expresses the act of turning; the changing of the heart, or of the ruling preference of the soul. It might with propriety be rendered by the terms "changing the heart." The English word "repentance" is often used to express regret, remorse, sorrow, &c., and is used in so loose a sense as not to convey a distinct idea to the common mind of the true nature of evangelical repentance. A turning from sin to holiness, or more strictly, from a state of consecration to self to a state of consecration to God, is and must be the turning, the change of mind, or the repentance that is required of all sinners. Nothing less can constitute a virtuous repentance, and nothing more can be required.

III. *What is implied in repentance.*

1. Such is the correlation of the will to the intellect, that repentance must imply reconsideration or after-thought. It must imply self-reflection, and such an apprehension of one's guilt as to produce self-condemnation. That selfishness is sin, and that it is right and duty to consecrate the whole being to God and his service, are first truths of reason. They are necessarily assumed by all moral agents. They are, however, often unthought of, not reflected upon. Repentance implies the giving up of the attention to the consideration and self-application of these first truths, and consequently implies conviction of sin, and guilt, and ill-desert, and a sense of shame and self-condemnation. It implies an

intellectual and a hearty justification of God, of his law, of his moral and providential government, and of all his works and ways.

It implies an apprehension of the nature of sin, that it belongs to the heart, and does not essentially consist in, though it leads to, outward conduct; that it is an utterly unreasonable state of mind, and that it justly deserves the wrath and curse of God for ever.

It implies an apprehension of the reasonableness of the law and commands of God, and of the folly and madness of sin. It implies an intellectual and a hearty giving up of all controversy with God upon all and every point.

It implies a conviction, that God is wholly right, and the sinner wholly wrong, and a thorough and hearty abandonment of all excuses and apologies for sin. It implies an entire and universal acquittal of God from every shade and degree of blame, a thorough taking of the entire blame of sin to self. It implies a deep and thorough abasement of self in the dust, a crying out of soul against self, and a most sincere and universal, intellectual, and hearty exaltation of God.

2. Such, also, is the connexion of the will and the sensibility, that the turning of the will, or evangelical repentance, implies sorrow for sin as necessarily resulting from the turning of the will, together with the intellectual views of sin which are implied in repentance. Neither conviction of sin, nor sorrow for it, constitutes repentance. Yet from the correlation which is established between the intelligence, the sensibility, and the will, both conviction of sin, and sorrow for it, are implied in evangelical repentance, the one as necessarily preceding, and the other as often preceding, and always and necessarily resulting from repentance. During the process of conviction, it often happens, that the sensibility is hardened and unfeeling; or, if there is much feeling, it is often only regret, remorse, agony, and despair. But when the heart has given way, and the evangelical turning has taken place, it often happens that the fountain of the great deep in the sensibility is broken up, the sorrows of the soul are stirred to the very bottom, and the sensibility pours forth its gushing tides like an irresistible torrent. But it frequently happens, too, in minds less subject to deep emotion, that the sorrows do not immediately flow in deep and broad channels, but are mild, melting, tender, tearful, silent, subdued.

Self-loathing is another state of the sensibility implied in evangelical repentance. This state of mind may, and often does, exist where repentance is not, just as outward morality does. But, like outward morality, it must exist where true repentance is. Self-loathing is a natural and a necessary consequence of those intellectual views of self that are implied in repentance. While the intelligence apprehends the utter, shameful guilt of self, and the heart yields to the conviction, the sensibility necessarily sympathizes, and a feeling of self-loathing and abhorrence is the inevitable consequence.

It implies a loathing and abhorrence of the sins of others, a most deep and thorough feeling of opposition to sin--to all sin, in self and everybody else. Sin has become, to the penitent soul, the abominable thing which it hates.

3. It implies a holy indignation toward all sin and all sinners, and a manifest opposition to every form of iniquity.

Repentance also implies peace of mind. The soul that has full confidence in the infinite wisdom and love of God, in the atonement of Christ, and in his universal providence, cannot but have peace. And further, the soul that has abandoned all sin, and turned to God, is no longer in a state of warfare with itself and with God. It must have peace of conscience--and peace with God. It implies heart-complacency in God, and in all the holy. This must follow from the very nature of repentance.

It implies confession of sin to God and to man, as far as sin has been committed against men. If the heart has thoroughly renounced sin, it has become benevolent, and is of course disposed, as far as possible, to undo the wrong it has committed, to confess sin, and humble self on account of it, before God and our neighbour, whom we have injured. Repentance implies humility, or a willingness to be known and estimated according to our real character. It implies a disposition to do right, and to confess our faults to God and man, as far as man has a right to know them. Let no one who has refused, and still refuses or neglects to confess his sins to God, and those sins to men that have been committed against them, profess repentance unto salvation; but let him remember that God has said, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whose confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy:" and again, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed."

Repentance implies a willingness to make restitution, and the actual making of it as far as ability goes. He is not just, and of course is not penitent, who has injured his neighbour in his person, reputation, property, or in anything, and is unwilling to make restitution. And he is unwilling to make restitution who neglects to do so whenever he is able. It is impossible that a soul truly penitent should neglect to make all practicable restitution, for the plain reason that penitence implies a benevolent and just attitude of the will, and the will controls the conduct by a law of necessity.

Repentance implies reformation of outward life. This follows from reformation of heart by a law of necessity. It is naturally impossible that a penitent soul, remaining penitent, should indulge in any known sin. If the heart be reformed, the life must be as the heart is.

It implies a universal reformation of life, that is, a reformation extending to all outward sin. The penitent does not, and remaining penitent, cannot, reform in respect to some sins only. If penitent at all, he must have repented of sin as sin, and of course of all sin. If he has turned to God, and consecrated himself to God, he has of course ceased from sin, from all sin as such. Sin, as we have seen on a former occasion, is a unit, and so is holiness. Sin consists in selfishness, and holiness in disinterested benevolence: it is therefore sheer nonsense to say that repentance can consist with indulgence in some sins. What are generally termed little, as well as what are termed great sins, are alike rejected and abhorred by the truly penitent soul, and this from a law of necessity, he being truly penitent.

4. It implies faith or confidence in God in all things. It implies, not only the conviction that God is wholly right in all his controversy with sinners, but also that the heart has yielded to this conviction, and has come fully over to confide most implicitly in him in all respects, so that it can readily commit all interests for time and eternity to his hands. Repentance is a state of mind that implies the fullest confidence in all the promises and threatenings of God, and in the atonement and grace of Christ.

IV. *What impenitence is not.*

1. It is not a negation, or the mere absence of repentance. Some seem to regard impenitence as a nonentity, as the mere absence of repentance; but this is a great mistake.

2. It is not mere apathy in the sensibility in regard to sin, and a mere want of sorrow for it.

3. It is not the absence of conviction of sin, nor the consequent carelessness of the sinner in respect to the commandments of God.

4. It is not an intellectual self-justification, nor does it consist in a disposition to cavil at truth and the claims of God. These may and often do result from impenitence, but are not identical with it.

5. It does not consist in the spirit of excuse-making, so often manifested by sinners. This spirit is a result of impenitence, but does not constitute it.

6. Nor does it consist in the love of sin for its own sake, nor in the love of sin in any sense. It is not a constitutional appetite, relish, or craving for sin. If this constitutional craving for sin existed, it could have no moral character, inasmuch as it would be a wholly involuntary state of mind. It could not be the crime of impenitence.

V. *What impenitence is.*

1. It is everywhere in the Bible represented as a heinous sin, as in Matt. xi. 20-24: "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for thee." Here, as elsewhere, impenitence is represented as most aggravated wickedness.

Impenitence is a phenomenon of the will, and consists in the will's cleaving to self-indulgence under light. It consists in the will's pertinacious adherence to the gratification

of self, in despite of all the light with which the sinner is surrounded. It is not, as has been said, a passive state nor a mere negation, nor the love of sin for its own sake; but it is an active and obstinate state of the will, a determined holding on to that course of self-seeking which constitutes sin, not from a love to sin, but for the sake of the gratification. This, under light, is of course, aggravated wickedness. Considered in this view, it is easy to account for all the woes and denunciations that the Saviour uttered against it. When the claims of God are revealed to the mind, it must necessarily yield to them, or strengthen itself in sin. It must, as it were, gird itself up, and struggle to resist the claims of duty. This strengthening self in sin under light is the particular form of sin which we call impenitence. All sinners are guilty of it because all have some light, but some are vastly more guilty of it than others.

VI. *Notice some things that are implied in impenitence.*

As it essentially consists in a cleaving to self-indulgence under light, it implies,--

1. That the impenitent sinner obstinately prefers his own petty and momentary gratification to all the other and higher interests of God and the universe; that because these gratifications are his own, or the gratification of self, he therefore gives them the preference over all the infinite interests of all other beings.

2. It implies the deliberate and actual setting at naught, not only of the interests of God and of the universe, as of no value, but it implies also a total disregard, and even contempt, of the rights of all other beings. It is a practical denial that they have any rights or interests to be promoted.

3. It implies a rejection of the authority of God, and contempt for it, as well as a spurning of his law and gospel.

4. It implies a bidding defiance to God, and a virtual challenge to him to do his worst.

5. It implies the utmost fool-hardiness, and a state of utter recklessness of consequences.

6. It implies the utmost injustice and disregard of all that is just and equal, and this, be it remembered, under light.

7. It implies a present justification of all past sin. The sinner who holds on to his self-indulgence, in the presence of the light of the gospel, really in heart justifies all his past rebellion.

8. Consequently present impenitence, especially under the light of the glorious gospel, is a heart-justification of all sin. It is taking sides deliberately with sinners against God, and is a virtual endorsing of all the sins of earth and hell. This principle is clearly implied in Christ's teaching, Matt. xxiii. 34-36: "Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall

ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city; that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily, I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation."

9. Present impenitence, under all the light and experience which the sinner now has, involves the guilt of all his past sin. If he still holds on to it, he in heart justifies it. If he in heart justifies it, he virtually recommits it. If in the presence of accumulated light, he still persists in sin, he virtually endorses, recommits, and is again guilty of all past sin.

10. Impenitence is a charging God with sin; it is self-justification, and consequently it condemns God. It is a direct controversy with God, and a denial of his right to govern, and of the sinner's duty to obey.

11. It is a deliberate rejection of mercy, and a virtual declaration that God is a tyrant, and that he ought not to govern, but that he ought to be resisted.

12. It implies a total want of confidence in God; want of confidence in his character and government; in his works and ways. It virtually charges God with usurpation, falsehood, and selfishness in all their odious forms. It is a making war on every moral attribute of God, and is utter enmity against him. It is mortal enmity, and would of course always manifest itself in sinners, as it did when Christ was upon the earth. When he poured the light upon them, they hardened themselves until they were ripe for murdering him. This is the true nature of impenitence. It involves the guilt of a mortal enmity against God.

VII. *Notice some of the characteristics or evidences of impenitence.*

1. A manifested indifference to the sins of men is evidence of an impenitent and sin-justifying state of mind. It is impossible that a penitent soul should not be deeply and heartily opposed to all sin; and if heartily opposed to it, it is impossible that he should not manifest this opposition, for the heart controls the life by a law of necessity.

2. Of course a manifest heart-complacency in sin or in sinners is, sure evidence of an impenitent state of mind. "He that will be the friend of the world is the enemy of God." Heart-complacency in sinners is that friendship with the world that is enmity against God.

3. A manifest want of zeal in opposing sin and in promoting reformation, is a sure indication of an impenitent state of mind. The soul that has been truly convinced of sin, and turned from sin to the love and service of God, cannot but manifest a deep interest in every effort to expel sin out of the world. Such a soul cannot but be zealous in opposing sin, and in building up and establishing righteousness in the earth.

4. A manifest want of sympathy with God in respect to his government, providential and moral, is an evidence of impenitence of heart. A penitent soul, as has been said, will and must of course justify God in all his ways. This is implied in genuine repentance. A

disposition to complain of the strictness and rigour of God's commandments--to speak of the providence of God in a complaining manner, to murmur at its allotments, and repine at the circumstances in which it has placed a soul, is to evince an impenitent and rebellious state of mind.

5. A manifest want of confidence in the character, faithfulness, and promises of God, is also sure evidence of an impenitent state of mind. A distrust of God in any respect cannot consist with a penitent state of heart.

6. The absence of peace of mind is sure evidence of an impenitent state. The penitent soul must have peace of conscience, because penitence is a state of conscious rectitude. It also must have peace with God, in view of, and through confidence in, the atonement of Christ. Repentance is the turning from an attitude of rebellion against God, to a state of universal submission to his will, and approbation of it as wise and good. This must of course bring peace to the soul. When therefore there is a manifest want of peace, there is evidence of impenitence of heart.

7. Every unequivocal manifestation of selfishness is a conclusive evidence of present impenitence. Repentance, as we have seen, consists in the turning of the soul from selfishness to benevolence. It follows of course that the presence of selfishness, or a spirit of self-indulgence, is conclusive evidence of an impenitent state of mind. Repentance implies the denial of self; the denial or subjection of all the appetites, passions, and propensities to the law of the intelligence. Therefore a manifest spirit of self-indulgence, a disposition to seek the gratification of the appetites and passions, such as the subjection of the will to the use of tobacco, of alcohol, or to any of the natural or artificial appetites under light and in opposition to the law of the reason, is conclusive evidence of present impenitence. I say, "under light, and in opposition to the law of the reason." Such articles as those just named, are sometimes used medicinally, and because they are regarded as useful, and even indispensable to health under certain circumstances. In such cases their use may be a duty. But they are more frequently used merely to gratify appetite, and in the face of a secret conviction that they are not only unnecessary, but absolutely injurious. This is indulgence that constitutes sin. It is impossible that such indulgence should consist with repentance. Such a mind must be in impenitence, or there is no such thing as impenitence.

8. A spirit of self-justification is another evidence of impenitence. This manifestation must be directly the opposite of that which the truly penitent soul will make.

9. A spirit of excuse-making for neglect of duty is also a conclusive evidence of an impenitent heart. Repentance implies the giving up of all excuses for disobedience, and a hearty obedience in all things. Of course, where there is a manifest disposition to make excuses for not being what and all God requires us to be, it is certain that there is, and must be an impenitent state of mind. It is war with God.

10. A fearfulness that implies a want of confidence in the perfect faithfulness of God, or that implies unbelief in any respect, is an indication of an impenitent state of mind.

11. A want of candour upon any moral subject relating to self, also betrays an impenitent heart. A penitent state of the will is committed to know and to embrace all truth. Therefore a prejudiced, uncandid state of mind must be inconsistent with penitence, and a manifestation of prejudice must evince present impenitence.

12. An unwillingness to be searched, and to have all our words and ways brought into the light of truth, and to be reprov'd when we are in error, is a sure indication of an impenitent state of mind. "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."

13. Only partial reformation of life, also indicates that the heart has not embraced the whole will of God. When there is a disposition manifested to indulge in some sin, no matter how little, it is sure evidence of impenitence of heart. The penitent soul rejects sin as sin; of course every kind or degree of iniquity is put away, loathed, and abhorred. "Whoso keepeth the whole law and yet offends in one point, is guilty of all;" that is, if a man in one point unequivocally sins or disobeys God, it is certain that he truly from the heart obeys him in nothing. He has not an obedient state of mind. If he really had supreme respect to God's authority, he could not but obey him in all things. If therefore it be found, that a professor of penitence does not manifest the spirit of universal obedience; if in some things he is manifestly self-indulgent, it may be known that he is altogether yet in sin, and that he is still "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."

14. Neglect or refusal to confess and make restitution, so far as opportunity and ability are enjoyed, is also a sure indication of an unjust and impenitent state of mind. It would seem impossible for a penitent soul not at once to see and be impressed with the duty of making confession and restitution to those who have been injured by him. When this is refused or neglected, there must be impenitence. The heart controls the life by a law of necessity; when, therefore, there is a heart that confesses and forsakes sin, it is impossible that this should not appear in outward confession and restitution.

15. A spirit of covetousness, or grasping after the world, is a sure indication of impenitence. "Covetousness is idolatry." It is a hungering and thirsting after, and devotion to this world. Acquisitiveness indulg'd must be positive proof of an impenitent state of mind. If any man love the world, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

16. A want of interest in, and compassion for, sinners, is a sure indication of impenitence. If one has seen his own guilt and ruin, and has found himself sunk in the horrible pit and miry clay of his own abominations, and has found the way of escape, to feel deeply for sinners, to manifest a great compassion and concern for them, and a zeal for their salvation, is as natural as to breathe. If this sympathy and zeal are not manifested, we may rely upon it that there is still impenitence. There is a total want of that love to God and souls that is always implied in repentance. Seest thou a professed convert to Christ whose compassions are not stirred, and whose zeal for the salvation of souls is not awakened? Be assured that you behold a hypocrite.

17. A disposition to apologize for sin, to take part with sinners, or a want of fulness and clearness in condemning them, and taking sides altogether with God, is evidence of an impenitent state of mind. A hesitancy, or want of clearness in the mind's apprehension of the justice of God in condemning sinners to an eternal hell, shows that the eyes have not yet been thoroughly open to the nature, guilt, and desert of sin, and consequently this state of spiritual blindness is sad evidence of an impenitent heart.

18. A want of moral or spiritual perception, is also an indication of impenitence. When an individual is seen to have little or no conscience on many moral questions, can use tobacco, alcohol, and such like things, under the present light that has been shed on these practices; when self can be indulged without compunctions, this is a most certain indication of an impenitent heart. True repentance is infallibly connected with a sensitive and discriminating conscience. When, therefore, there is a seared conscience, you may know there is a hard and impenitent heart.

19. Spiritual sloth or indolence is another evidence of an impenitent heart. The soul that thoroughly turns to God, and consecrates itself to him, and wholly commits itself to promote his glory in the building up of his kingdom, will be, must be, anything but slothful. A disposition to spiritual idleness, or to lounging or indolence of any kind, is an evidence that the heart is impenitent. I might pursue this subject to an indefinite length; but what has been said must suffice for this course of instruction, and is sufficient to give you the clue by which you may detect the windings and delusions of the impenitent heart.

I must conclude this discussion with several

REMARKS.

1. Many confound conviction of sin, and the necessarily resulting emotions of remorse, regret, and sorrow, with evangelical repentance. They give the highest evidence of having fallen into this mistake.

2. Considering the current teaching upon this subject, and the great want of discrimination in public preaching, and in writings on the subject of repentance, this mistake is natural. How few divines sufficiently discriminate between the phenomena of the intelligence, the sensibility, and the will. But until this discrimination is thoroughly made, great mistakes upon this subject may be expected both among the clergy and the laity, and multitudes will be self-deceived.

3. It is of the highest importance for the ministry to understand, and constantly insist in their teaching, that all virtuous exercises of mind are phenomena of the will, and in no case merely passive states of mind; that therefore they are connected with the outward life by a law of necessity, and that therefore when there is a right heart, there must be a right life.

4. It is a most gross, as it is a very common delusion, to separate religion from a pure morality, and repentance from reformation. "What God," by an unalterable law of necessity, "has joined together, let not man put asunder."

5. It is also common to fall into the error of separating devotion from practical benevolence. Many seem to be striving after a devotion that is not piety. They are trying to work their sensibility into a state which they suppose to be devotion, while they retain selfishness in their hearts. They live in habitual self-indulgence, and yet observe seasons of what they call devotion. Devotion is with them mere emotion, a state of feeling, a phenomenon of the sensibility, a devotion without religion. This is a grievous delusion.

6. The doctrine of repentance, or the necessity of repentance as a condition of salvation, is as truly a doctrine of natural as of revealed religion. It is a self-evident truth, that the sinner cannot be saved except he repents. Without repentance God cannot forgive him; and if he could and should, such forgiveness could not save him; for, in his sins, salvation is naturally impossible to him. Without just that change which has been described, and which the Bible calls repentance, and which it makes a condition of pardon and salvation, it is plainly, naturally, and governmentally impossible for any sinner to be saved.

7. Repentance is naturally necessary to peace of mind in this life. Until the sinner repents he is at war with himself, and at war with God. There is a mutiny, and a struggle, and a controversy, going on within him. His conscience will not be satisfied. Though cast down from the throne of government and trampled under foot, it will mutter, and sometimes thunder its remonstrances and rebukes; and although it has not the power to control the will, still it will assert the right to control. Then there is war within the breast of the sinner himself, and until he repents he carries the elements of hell within him; and sooner or later they will take fire, and burst upon his soul in a universal and eternal conflagration.