



† And I saw another angel fly
in the midst of heaven, hav-
ing the everlasting gospel to
preach unto them that dwell
on the earth.—Revelation 14:6

The Angel Message Series
Chapter 3

REPENTANCE

by Elbert A. Smith



www.LatterDayTeach.com

THE REORGANIZED
CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER DAY SAINTS

From Sin Through Sorrow

From sin through sorrow unto thee we pass
By that same path our true forefathers trod;
And let not reason fail me, nor the sod
Draw from my death thy living flower and grass,
Before I learn that Love, this is, and was,
My Father, and my Brother, and my God.
Steel me with patience! Soften me with grief!
Let blow the trumpet strongly while I pray,
Till this embattled wall of unbelief,
My prison, not my fortress, falls away!
—Tennyson.

Man-like it is to fall into sin,
Fiend-like it is to dwell therein,
Christ-like is it for sin to grieve,
God-like is it all sin to leave.—Longfellow.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.—Jesus.

Repentance

CHAPTER 3

Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.—Jesus.

Are you satisfied with your present mode of life? Are you satisfied with your past record? If not, the message of Jesus comes to you, first, in invitation, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted"; second, in warning, Except ye repent, ye shall perish.

GOD WILL WELCOME YOU

Be assured, at the very beginning, that God will welcome you, under the terms of his wonderful gospel plan. His attitude is one of invitation.

A popular, and so-called "orthodox" confession of faith says of Christ, "Who truly suffered, was dead and buried, to reconcile his Father to us."

Make no mistake, Jesus did not come to reconcile *God* to us. Jesus came to reconcile *us* to God. The attitude of God has ever been one of love and invitation.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.—John 3:16.

TO RECONCILE MAN TO GOD

God never hated man or assumed an aloof and vindictive attitude, that Jesus should come and live and die to reconcile him to man. Man went out of the way, and disobeyed, hated, and feared God. Jesus came to reconcile man to God.

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to-wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself. . . . and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.—2 Corinthians 5: 18-20.

If you have the necessary faith to serve as a spring of action, and the good sense, grace, and courage to repent, God will receive you on the terms of his gospel.

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL

Jesus put into imperishable story form the dramatic experiences of the prodigal son. Having demanded his patrimony of his father, this young man left his father's house and went into a strange country. There he wasted his fair inheritance in riotous living.

Presently there came a famine in the land. His heritage was gone. He was in dire want. So he joined himself to a citizen of that country and was set to feed the swine.

So low had he fallen, and into such want, that he would fain have eaten the husks that were fed to the swine. But let the Man of Parables proceed with the tale:

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on

his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.—Luke 15: 17-24.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE SON

The son had been, in a sense, insane. At least, like all sinners, he had been obsessed with folly. But at last he came to himself. He already had faith in his father. Next he began to repent.

At first his repentance seemed to be only because of his hard circumstances. The results of his course began to obtrude themselves upon his notice, and they were painful.

This probably is the beginning of repentance with many men. It is not in itself adequate. Probably with many, if indeed not with most men, a halt is first called in their downward course because of a fear of or dislike for the consequences of sin.

This frame of mind must lead to something higher, or true repentance can not ensue. It is at this point that the sense of a Father's love intervenes and leads to complete repentance.

With the prodigal son, the primary impulse to get away from an intolerable situation and back to a comfortable one was succeeded by genuine loathing for the sin that he had committed. He abhorred the state of ignominy to which he had fallen. He loathed himself in that condition. He was resolved never to return to his past course of life, not alone because

retribution followed such a course, but because he now saw it in its true light, a thing to detest and forsake because of its very nature. His heart turned back to his father in love.

With the utmost penitence, humility, and sorrow, he returned to his father, willing to do his bidding in all things. Willing to become a servant; he was received as a son.

THE FATHER'S ATTITUDE

Never at any time had the father utterly cast him off. He had never ceased to love him. The father abhorred his folly and his manner of life. But when the son came to himself and returned with true repentance in his heart, and with confession on his lips, he received him with the utmost joy. These are among the things that Jesus taught in that matchless parable.

It was just before he related this parable that he declared: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." (Luke 5: 10.)

Are you feeding on husks? Are you estranged from your Father in heaven? Have you wasted your fair inheritance? If so, why not come to yourself now? Repent. Turn from your present life. Trust your Father's love. Do his will.

WHAT WAS ACCOMPLISHED BY THE RETURN?

The first great thing that was accomplished by the repentance and return of the prodigal was reconciliation to his father. An at-one-ment was effected. They were one again in spirit.

Note this well: The wasted years were not recovered. The wasted inheritance was gone. The past could not be lived over.

But the prodigal had returned to his father's house. He was again willing to include himself within the circle of that father's love. Reconciliation had obtained. He was separated from his sin. And, second great fact mark it well, joyful thought, hope of all men, he was ready to make a new *start*. Yes, he was ready to make a *new start*. Are you ready to make a new start?

START FROM WHERE YOU ARE

Bourke is author of the truism, apparently absurd, really very wise and witty: "If we would go anywhere, we must start from where we are."

However much we may wish to be somewhere else, we must start from where we are. The prodigal made his start from the pig sty. It was not a nice place to start from; but it was necessary for him to start from where he was. That was where he was.

You may not be satisfied with your present condition as a starting point; but from there you must start. There may be some things that you have lost beyond recall, wasted years, energies, and means; but that can not be helped.

The question is, Are you ready for a *new start*? Are you willing to start *now*, and from where you *are*? Do you wish to be a true man or woman from here and now, henceforth? If so, on condition of true repentance, your Father is ready to meet you and welcome you with joy, and you will be in a position to make the most of the future.

Sorrow for the irrevocable past is only a part of repentance; to gird up the loins and press forward into as glorious a future as you can create for yourself, with God's help, is certainly equally important.

THE STORY OF THE SHASTA DAISY

Burbank took the seeds of a common wild daisy and planted them. When the plants springing therefrom grew up, he pulled up all but the largest two, and when they blossomed he plucked off all but the largest two blossoms. The seeds from these he planted, and when they grew he pulled up all but the largest two plants. When they blossomed he plucked off all but the largest two blossoms. From these he saved the seeds and planted them.

This process he repeated with almost infinite patience for twenty-five years, a quarter of a century, and then he had the great, white Shasta daisy. Burbank had only one short life. He was working with nothing greater than a flower.

God has eternity. He is working with immortal souls. If you will cooperate with him, in time, or in eternity, he will carry you forward to the very limit of your capabilities of development.

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3: 13, 14.)

FRUITS MEET FOR REPENTANCE

We can not emphasize too strongly the thought that repentance should be associated with a forward movement, with a change of living. Good works and

obedience to God are the natural fruits of repentance.

To the multitudes that came out to hear him preach, John said: "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance." (Luke 3: 8.)

Jesus himself took up the message proclaimed by John, and, announcing the kingdom of heaven, commanded the people to repent (Mark 1: 14, 15; Luke 24: 46, 47). The apostles carried the message everywhere with them (Mark 6: 12).

Paul said to Agrippa:

Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision; but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should *repent* and *turn to God*, and *do works* meet for repentance.—Acts 26: 19, 20.

It will be seen by this that the message was to those who would believe, *turn to God*, and do the works meet for repentance.

THE CHIEF REQUIREMENTS

In considering the things required of man and the things required of God to effect a reconciliation, Wright makes this illuminating statement regarding God's chief demand:

Analyzed, the demand seems to be: (1) a turning from sin, a change of mind, of attitude, of purpose; a repentance; a conversion; (2) the acceptance of a righteous or new nature as a guarantee of righteousness for the future. This second demand, so often overlooked as a necessity of the atonement, is quite essential as the first.—Problem of the Atonement, p. 16.

RESTITUTION WHERE POSSIBLE

It goes almost without saying that true repentance will be accompanied by an effort to make past wrongs right. The law given through Moses required that where one had defrauded another he should restore that which had been taken unjustly, adding to the principal "the fifth part more." (Leviticus 6: 1-5.)

Zaccheus declared, "If I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." (Luke 19: 8.)

Of course there are many cases where it is impossible to make restitution. In such instances the matter must be left with God for adjudication, trusting to his divine mercy, as in all instances; and if the matter be one between man and man, though restitution may not be possible, human reconciliation and forgiveness should be sought.

A PREREQUISITE OF BAPTISM

On the day of Pentecost Peter addressed a most remarkable congregation. He faced the very men who had consented to the death of Jesus. He faced mockers who had said that the saints were all drunken. He faced men who would not hesitate to kill him and his associates.

But endowed with that power from on high that Christ had promised them, he preached such a wonderful discourse that those men were pricked in their hearts and stood self-condemned, crying out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

Then Peter said unto them, *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of*

sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.—Acts 2: 38.

Peter told them what to do to be saved. They already *believed*. The next step was to *repent*. Repentance was to be followed by *baptism*, in its logical order, for the remission of their sins, and then the gift of the Holy Ghost was to be received. All this is in harmony with Paul's enumeration of the principles of the gospel of Christ:

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.—Hebrews 6: 1, 2.

THE GOSPEL MIRROR

The Apostle James uses this remarkable language:

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye *doers* of the word, and not *hearers only*, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.—James 1: 21-25.

“Blessed are they that DO.” (Revelation 22: 14.) But do not overlook the figure of the mirror. In the gospel of Christ we get a full, fair vision of ourselves as we are. Robert Burns said:

Oh, wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursel's as others see us!

It wad frae monie a blunder free us,
And foolish notion.

Infinitely more important is it to see ourselves as God sees us. Having been granted such a look into the gospel mirror, how foolish to go away and forget, failing to rectify the defects seen; like a man who, looking into a natural glass, sees his face soiled and sooty and his clothing unpresentable, and then, forgetting his condition, goes happily out into the society of the clean and decent.

AROUSED DISCONTENT

This glimpse at ourselves as we are arouses discontent. The sinner sees himself as he is, black, perhaps, with most loathsome immoralities, deformed and all but ruined by excesses.

Slavery of every kind leaves its unmistakable traces in the features and form, as in the "Man with a hoe," immortalized by Markham:

Who loosened and let down that brutal jaw?
Whose was the hand that slanted back that brow?
Whose breath blew out the light within his brain? . . .
Hell has no form more terrible than this.

The man with a hoe must see himself as he is before he even desires to be free. No man can be free who is satisfied with slavery. Discontent must be aroused. Discontent with self is the essence of repentance.

Discontent aroused by a look in the gospel mirror might quickly give place to black despair. But here enters the love of God with the gospel of hope, the "perfect law of liberty." Faith in God, repentance

from dead works, regeneration in the waters of baptism, these set men free, and the Holy Spirit guides them on to all truth.

Paul enlarges on the mirror simile used by James; for this marvelous gospel mirror has another quality. It not only shows me to myself as I am; it also shows me as I may be. It reveals to me the man that I may become under God's divine direction:

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, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty.-- Paul.

QUIT YOURSELVES LIKE MEN

Are you a man? Assert your manhood then.

Break off from evil ways beneath a man.

They do not contribute to make you men.

Shame! Do not say, "I can not"; say, "I can."

Are you a woman? There is the same need.

Behold the little ones are round your knee,

To all your words and actions they give heed,

And imitate with aptness what they see.

Are you a young man? Oh, then while the light

And dew of life's sweet morn is round your path,

Serve ye its Giver in your fresh young might.

For lo, his word a thousand beauties hath.

Are you a maiden? Truly serve the Lord

Before your friends and brothers; make them know

The power of purity in his great word:

Your influence is large, for weal or woe.

Do you love wisdom? Who so wise as he?

Or poetry? Come, you will be at home

With all things fair and beautiful and free.

Do you love wickedness? Then do not come.

From Noah down all prophets cried repent;

And I of passages might find a score
To prove the doctrine. But my time is spent;
And all that I might say was said before.

—David H. Smith.

Note.—The next chapter will be devoted to baptism in water by immersion: A discussion of the great divine commandments, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;” and “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he can not enter into the kingdom.”

