

**A CALL TO THE UNCONVERTED:
TO WHICH ARE ADDED, SEVERAL
VALUABLE ESSAYS; WITH AN
INTRODUCTORY ESSAY, PP 1-235**

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A Call to the Unconverted: To which are Added, Several Valuable Essays; With an Introductory Essay, pp 1-235 by Richard Baxter & Thomas Chalmers

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RICHARD BAXTER & THOMAS CHALMERS

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BY RICHARD BAXTER.

WITH
AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY,

BY THOMAS CHALMERS, D. D.

NEW-YORK :
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1850.

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

HAVING already introduced to the notice of our readers one of RICHARD BAXTER'S most valuable Treatises,* in the Essay to which we adverted to the character and writings of this venerable author, we count it unnecessary at present to make any allusion to them, but shall confine our remarks to the subject of the three Treatises which compose the present volume, namely, "A CALL TO THE UNCONVERTED TO TURN AND LIVE;" "NOW OR NEVER;" and "FIFTY REASONS WHY A SINNER OUGHT TO TURN TO GOD THIS DAY WITHOUT DELAY."

These Treatises are characterized by all that solemn earnestness, and urgency of appeal, for which the writings of this much-admired author are so peculiarly distinguished. He seems to look upon mankind solely with the eyes of the Spirit, and exclusively to recognise them in their spiritual relations, and in the great and essential elements of their immortal being. Their future destiny is the all-important concern which fills and engrosses his mind, and he regards nothing of any magnitude but what has a distinct bearing on their spiritual and eternal condition. His business, therefore, is always with the conscience; to which, in these Treatises, he makes the most forcible appeals, and which he plies with all those arguments which are fitted to awaken the sinner to a deep sense of the necessity and importance

* The Saints' Everlasting Rest, with an Essay by Mr. Erskine.

of immediate repentance. In his "Call to the Unconverted," he endeavours to move them by the most touching of all representations, the tenderness of a beseeching God waiting to be gracious, and not willing that any should perish; and while he employs every form of entreaty, which tenderness and compassion can suggest, to allure the sinner to "turn and live," he does not shrink from forcing on his convictions those considerations which are fitted to alarm his fears, the terrors of the Lord, and the wrath, not merely of an offended Lawgiver, but of a God of love, whose threatenings he disregards, whose grace he despises, and whose mercy he rejects. And aware of the deceitfulness of sin in hardening the heart, and in betraying the sinner into a neglect of his spiritual interests, he divests him of every refuge, and strips him of every plea for postponing his preparation for eternity. He forcibly exposes the delusion of convenient seasons, and the awful infatuation and hazard of delay; and knowing the magnitude of the stake at issue, he urges the sinner to immediate repentance, as if the fearful and almost absolute alternative were "Now or Never." And to secure the commencement of such an important work against all the dangers to which procrastination might expose it, he endeavours to arrest the sinner in his career of guilt and unconcern, and resolutely to fix his determination on "turning to God this day without delay."

There are two very prevalent delusions on this subject, which we should like to expose; the one regards the *nature*, and the other the *season* of repentance; both of which are pregnant with mischief to the minds of men. With regard to the first, much mischief has arisen from mistakes respecting the meaning of the term *repentance*. The word repentance occurs with two different meanings in the New Testament; and it is to be regretted, that two different words could not have been devised to express these. This is chargeable upon the poverty

of our language; for it is to be observed, that in the original Greek the distinction in the meanings is pointed out by a distinction in the words. The employment of one term to denote two different things has the effect of confounding and misleading the understanding; and it is much to be wished, that every ambiguity of this kind were cleared away from that most interesting point in the process of a human soul, at which it turns from sin unto righteousness, and from the power of Satan unto God.

When, in common language, a man says, 'I repent of such an action,' he is understood to say, 'I am sorry for having done it.' The feeling is familiar to all of us. How often does the man of dissipation prove this sense of the word repentance, when he awakes in the morning, and, oppressed by the languor of his exhausted faculties, looks back with remorse on the follies and profligacies of the night that is past? How often does the man of unguarded conversation prove it, when he thinks of the friend whose feelings he has wounded by some hasty utterance which he cannot recall? How often is it proved by the man of business, when he reflects on the rash engagement which ties him down to a losing speculation? All these people would be perfectly understood when they say, 'We repent of these doings.' The word repentance so applied is about equivalent to the word regret. There are several passages in the New Testament where this is the undoubted sense of the word repentance. In Matt. xxvii. 3. the wretched Judas repented himself of his treachery; and surely, when we think of the awful denunciation uttered by our Saviour against the man who should betray him, that it were better for him if he had not been born, we will never confound the repentance which Judas experienced with that repentance which is unto salvation.

Now here lies the danger to practical Christianity. In the above-cited passage, to repent is just to regret, or to be sorry for; and this we conceive to

be by far the most prevailing sense of the term in the English language. But there are other places where the same term is employed to denote that which is urged upon us as a duty—that which is preached for the remission of sins—that which is so indispensable to sinners, as to call forth the declaration from our Saviour, that unless we have it, we shall all likewise perish. Now, though repentance, in all these cases, is expressed by the same term in our translation as the repentance of mere regret, it is expressed by a different term in the original record of our faith. This surely might lead us to suspect a difference of meaning, and should caution us against taking up with that, as sufficient for the business of our salvation, which is short of saving and scriptural repentance. There may be an alternation of wilful sin, and of deep-felt sorrow, up to the very end of our history—there may be a presumptuous sin committed every day, and a sorrow regularly succeeding it. Sorrow may embitter every act of sin—sorrow may darken every interval of sinful indulgence—and sorrow may give an unutterable anguish to the pains and the prospects of a deathbed. Couple all this with the circumstance that sorrow passes, in the common currency of our language, for repentance, and that repentance is made, by our Bible, to lie at the turning point from a state of condemnation to a state of acceptance with God; and it is difficult not to conceive that much danger may have arisen from this, leading to indistinct views of the nature of repentance, and to slender and superficial conceptions of the mighty change which is implied in it.

We are far from saying that the eye of Christians is not open to this danger—and that the vigilant care of Christian authors has not been employed in averting it. Where will we get a better definition of repentance unto life than in our Shorter Catechism? by which the sinner is represented not merely as grieving, but, along with his grief and hatred of sin, as turning from it unto God with full

purpose of, and endeavour after new obedience. But the mischief is, that the word repent has a common meaning, different from the theological; that wherever it is used, this common meaning is apt to intrude itself, and exert a kind of habitual imposition upon the understanding—that the influence of the single word carries it over the influence of the lengthened explanation—and thus it is that, for a steady progress in the obedience of the gospel, many persevere, to the end of their days, in a wretched course of sinning and of sorrowing, without fruit and without amendment.

To save the practically mischievous effect arising from the application of one term to two different things, one distinct and appropriate term has been suggested for the saving repentance of the New Testament. The term repentance itself has been restricted to the repentance of mere sorrow, and is made equivalent to regret; and for the other, able translators have adopted the word reformation. The one is expressive of sorrow for our past conduct; the other is expressive of our renouncing it. It denotes an actual turning from the habits of life that we are sorry for. Give us, say they, a change from bad deeds to good deeds, from bad habits to good habits, from a life of wickedness to a life of conformity to the requirements of heaven, and you give us reformation.

Now there is often nothing more unprofitable than a dispute about words; but if a word has got into common use, a common and generally understood meaning is attached to it; and if this meaning does not just come up to the thing which we want to express by it, the application of that word to that thing has the same misleading effects as in the case already alluded to. Now, we have much the same kind of exception to allege against the term reformation, that we have alleged against the term repentance. The term repentance is inadequate—and why? because, in the common use of it, it is