

ABSOLUTION AND CONFESSION.
THE MIND OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND
AS SHEWN IN THE HOMILIES
ESPECIALLY IN THE
“SECOND PART OF THE HOMILY ON REPENTANCE.”
Church Association Tract 57

ARTICLES OF RELIGION

ARTICLE XXXV. — *Of the Homilies.*

“The Second Book of the Homilies, the several Titles whereof we have joined under this Article doth contain a *godly* and *wholesome doctrine* and *necessary for these times*, as doth the former Book of Homilies which were set forth in the time of Edward the Sixth, and therefore we judge them to be read in the Churches by the Ministers, diligently and distinctly, that they may be understood of the people.”

HOMILY THE THIRTY-SECOND.

PART SECOND.

SECOND PART OF THE HOMILY ON REPENTANCE.

Hitherto have ye heard, well-beloved, how needful and necessary the doctrine of repentance is, and how earnestly it is throughout all the Scriptures of God urged and set forth, both by the ancient prophets, by our Saviour Jesus Christ, and his apostles; and that forasmuch as it is the conversion or turning again of the whole man unto God, from whom we go away by sin, these four points ought to be observed; that is, from whence or from what things we must return; unto whom this our returning must be made; by whose means it ought to be done, that it may be effectual; and last of all, after what sort we ought to behave ourselves in the same, that it may be profitable unto us, and attain unto the thing that we do seek by it. Ye have also learned, that as the opinion of them that deny the benefit of repentance unto those, that, after they be come to God, and grafted in our Saviour Jesus Christ, do, through the frailness of their flesh and the temptation of the devil, fall into some grievous and detestable sin, is most pestilent and pernicious; so we must beware, that we do in no wise think that we are able of our own selves, and of our own strength, to return unto the Lord our God, from whom we are gone away by our wickedness and sin. Now it shall be declared unto you, what be the true parts of repentance, and what things ought to move us to repent, and to return unto the Lord our God with all speed.

Repentance (as it is said before) is a true returning unto God, whereby men, forsaking utterly their idolatry and wickedness, do with a lively faith embrace, love, and worship the true living God only, and give themselves to all manner of good works, which by God's word they know to be acceptable unto him. Now there be four parts of repentance, which, being set together, may be likened to an easy and short ladder, whereby we may climb from the bottomless pit of perdition, that we cast ourselves into by our daily offences and grievous sins, up into the castle or tower of eternal and endless salvation.

The first is the contrition of the heart. For we must be earnestly sorry for our sins, and unfeignedly lament and bewail that we have by them so grievously offended our most bounteous and merciful

God, who so tenderly loved us, that he gave his only begotten Son, to die a most bitter death, and to shed his dear heart-blood for our redemption and deliverance. And verily this inward sorrow and grief, being conceived in the heart for the heinousness of sin, if it be earnest and unfeigned, is as a sacrifice to God; as the holy prophet David doth testify, saying, *A sacrifice to God is a troubled spirit; a contrite and broken heart, O Lord, thou wilt not despise.* (Ps. li. 17.)

But that this may take place in us, we must be diligent to read and hear the Scriptures and word of God, which most lively do paint out before our eyes our natural uncleanness, and the enormity of our sinful life. For unless we have a thorough feeling of our sins, how can it be that we should earnestly be sorry for them? Before David did hear the word of the Lord by the mouth of the prophet Nathan, what heaviness, I pray you, was in him for the adultery and the murder that he had committed? so that it might be said right well, that he slept in his own sin. (2 Sam. xii. 1-13.) We read in the Acts of the Apostles, that, when the people had heard the sermon of Peter, they were compunct and *pricked in their hearts.* (Acts ii. 37.) Which thing would never have been, if they had not heard that wholesome sermon of Peter. They therefore that have no mind at all neither to read nor yet to hear God's word, there is but small hope of them, that they will as much as once set their feet, or take hold, upon the first staff or step of this ladder; but rather will sink deeper and deeper into the bottomless pit of perdition. For if at any time, through the remorse of their conscience, which accuseth them, they feel any inward grief, sorrow, or heaviness for their sins; forasmuch as they want the salve and comfort of God's word, which they do despise, it will be unto them rather a mean to bring them to utter desperation, than otherwise.

The second is, an unfeigned confession and acknowledging of our sins unto God, whom by them we have so grievously offended, that, if he should deal with us according to his justice, we do deserve a thousand hells, if there could be so many. Yet if we will with a sorrowful and contrite heart make an unfeigned confession of them unto God, he will freely and frankly forgive them, and so put all our wickedness out of remembrance before the sight of his majesty that they shall no more be thought upon. (Ezek. xviii. 27.) Hereunto doth pertain, the golden saying of the holy prophet David, where he saith on this manner, *Then I acknowledged my sin unto thee, neither did I hide mine iniquity: I said I will confess against myself my wickedness unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the ungodliness of my sin.* (Ps. xxxii. 5.) These are also the words of John the Evangelist; *If we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to make us clean from all our wickedness.* (1 John i. 9.) Which ought to be understood of the confession that is made unto God. For these are St. Augustine's words; "That confession which is made unto God is required by God's law; whereof John the apostle speaketh, saying, *If we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to make us clean from all our wickedness.* For without this confession, sin is not forgiven." This is then the chiefest and most principal confession that in the Scriptures and word of God we are bidden to make, and without the which we shall never obtain pardon and forgiveness of our sins.

Indeed, besides this there is another kind of confession, which is needful and necessary. And of the same doth St. James speak after this manner, saying, *Acknowledge your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be saved.* (James v. 16.) As if he should say, Open that which grieveth you, that a remedy may be found. And this is commanded both for him that complaineth, and for him that heareth, that the one should shew his grief to the other. The true meaning of it is, that the faithful ought to acknowledge their offences, whereby some hatred, rancour, grudge, or malice, have risen or grown among them one to another, that a brotherly reconciliation may be had, without the which nothing that we do can be acceptable unto God, as our Saviour Jesus Christ doth witness himself, saying, *When thou offerest thine offering at the altar, if thou rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thine offering, and go and be reconciled; and when thou art reconciled, come and offer thine offering.* (Matt. v. 23, 24.) It may also thus be taken, that we ought to confess our weakness and infirmities one to another, to the end that, knowing each other's frailness, we may the more earnestly pray together unto Almighty God, our heavenly Father, that he will vouchsafe to pardon us our infirmities, for his Son

Jesus Christ's sake, and not to impute them unto us, when he shall render to every man according to his works. And whereas the adversaries go about to wrest this place, for to maintain their auricular confession withal, they are greatly deceived themselves, and do shamefully deceive others: for if this text ought to be understood of auricular confession, then the priests are as much bound to confess themselves unto the lay-people, as the lay-people are bound to confess themselves to them. And if to pray is to absolve, then the laity by this place hath as great authority to absolve the priests, as the priests have to absolve the laity. This did Johannes Scotus, otherwise called Duns. well perceive, who upon this place writeth on this manner; "Neither doth it seem unto me that James did give this commandment, or that he did set it forth as being received of Christ. For first and foremost, whence had he authority to bind the whole church, sith that he was only bishop of the church of Jerusalem? Except thou wilt say, that the same church was at the beginning the head church, and consequently that he was the head bishop, which thing the see of Rome will never grant." The understanding of it then is as in these words; *Confess your sins one to another*: a persuasion to humility, whereby he willeth us to confess ourselves generally unto our neightours, that we are sinners, according to this saying; *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* (1 John i. 8.)

And where that they do allege this saying of our Saviour Jesus Christ unto the leper to prove auricular confession to stand on God's word, *Go thy way, and shew thyself unto the priest* (Matt. viii. 4); do they not see that the leper was cleansed from his leprosy, before he was by Christ sent unto the priest for to show himself unto him? By the same reason we must be cleansed from our spiritual leprosy, I mean our sins must be forgiven us, before that we come to confession. What need we then to tell forth our sins into the ear of the priest, sith that they be already taken away?

Therefore holy Ambrose, in his second, sermon upon the hundred and nineteenth psalm, doth say full well, "*Go shew thyself unto the priest*. Who is the true priest, but he which is the *priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedeck*" (Heb. vii. 17.) Whereby this holy father doth understand, that both the priesthood and the law being changed, we ought to acknowledge none other priest for deliverance from our sins but our Saviour Jesus Christ; who, being our sovereign Bishop, doth with the sacrifice of his body and blood, offered once for ever upon the altar of the cross, most effectually cleanse the spiritual leprosy, and wash away the sins of all those that with true confession of the same do flee unto him. It is most evident and plain, that this auricular confession hath not the warrant of God's word, else it had not been lawful for Nectarius, bishop of Constantinople, upon a just occasion to have put it down. For when any thing ordained of God is by the lewdness of men abused, the abuse ought to be taken away, and the thing itself suffered to remain. Moreover, these are St. Augustine's words, "What have I to do with men, that they should hear my confession, as though they were able to heal my diseases? A curious sort of men to know another man's life, and slothful to correct and amend their own. Why do they seek to hear of me what I am, which will not hear of thee what they are? And how can they tell, when they hear by me of myself, whether I tell the truth or not; sith that no mortal man knoweth what is in man, but the spirit of man which is in him?" Augustine would not have written thus, if auricular confession had been used in his time. Being therefore not led with the conscience thereof, let us with fear and trembling, and with a true contrite heart, use that kind of confession that God doth command in his word; and then doubtless as *he is faithful and righteous, he will forgive us our sins, and make us clean from all wickedness*. I do not say, but that, if any do find themselves troubled in conscience, they may repair to their learned curate or pastor, or to some other godly learned man, and show the trouble and doubt of their conscience to them, and they may receive at their hand the comfortable salve of God's word: but it is against the true Christian liberty, that any man should be bound to the numbering of his sins, as it hath been used heretofore in the time of blindness and ignorance.

The third part of repentance is faith, whereby we do apprehend and take hold upon the promises of God, touching the free pardon and forgiveness of our sins: which promises are sealed up unto us, with the death and blood-shedding of his Son Jesus Christ. For what should avail and profit us to

be sorry for our sins, to lament and bewail that we have offended our most bounteous and merciful Father, or to confess and acknowledge our offences and trespasses, though it be done never so earnestly, unless we do steadfastly believe, and be fully persuaded, that God, for his Son Jesus Christ's sake, will forgive us all our sins, and put them out of remembrance, and from his sight? Therefore they that teach repentance without a lively faith in our Saviour Jesus Christ, do teach none other but Judas' repentance, as all the schoolmen do, which do only allow these three parts of repentance; the contrition of the heart, the confession of the mouth, and the satisfaction of the work. But all these things we find in Judas' repentance, which in outward appearance did far exceed and pass the repentance of Peter. For first and foremost, we read in the Gospel, that Judas was so sorrowful and heavy, yea that he was filled with such anguish and vexation of mind for that which he had done, that he could not abide to live any longer. Did not he also, before he hanged himself, make an open confession of his fault, when he said, *I have sinned, betraying the innocent blood?* And verily this was a very bold confession, which might have brought him to great trouble. For by it he did lay to the high priests and elders' charge the shedding of innocent blood, and that they were most abominable murderers. He did also make a certain kind of satisfaction, when he did cast their money unto them again. (Matt. xxvii. 3-5.) No such thing do we read of Peter, although he had committed a very heinous sin, and most grievous offence, in denying of his Master. We find that *he went out and wept bitterly* [Matt. xxvi. 75]; whereof Ambrose speaketh on this manner; "Peter was sorry and wept, because he erred as a man. I do not find what he said; I know that he wept. I read of his tears, but not of his satisfaction." But how chance that the one was received into favour again with God, and the other cast away, but because that the one did, by a lively faith in him whom he had denied, take hold upon the mercy of God; and the other wanted faith, whereby he did despair of the goodness and mercy of God? It is evident and plain then, that although we be never so earnestly sorry for our sins, acknowledge and confess them; yet all these things shall be but to bring us to utter desperation, except we do steadfastly believe that God our heavenly Father will, for his Son Jesus Christ's sake, pardon and forgive us our offences and trespasses, and utterly put them out of remembrance in his sight. Therefore, as we said before, they that teach repentance without Christ, and a lively faith in the mercy of God, do only teach Cain's or Judas' repentance.

The fourth is, an amendment of life, or a new life, in bringing forth fruits worthy of repentance. For they that do truly repent must be clean altered and changed, they must become new creatures, they must be no more the same that they were before. And therefore thus said John Baptist unto the Pharisees and Sadducees that came unto his baptism, *O generation of vipers, who hath forewarned you to flee from the anger to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance.* (Matt. iii. 7, 8.) Whereby we do learn, that, if we will have the wrath of God to be pacified, we must in no wise dissemble, but turn unto him again with a true and sound repentance, which may be known and declared by good fruits, as by most sure and infallible signs thereof.

They that do from the bottom of their hearts acknowledge their sins, and are unfeignedly sorry for their offences, will cast off all hypocrisy, and put on true humility, and lowliness of heart. They will not only receive the Physician of the soul, but also with a most fervent desire long for him. They will not only abstain from the sins of their former life, and from all other filthy vices, but also flee, eschew, and abhor all the occasions of them. And as they did before give themselves to uncleanness of life, so will they from henceforwards with all diligence give themselves to innocency, pureness of life, and true godliness.

We have the Ninevites for an example, which at the preaching of Jonas did not only proclaim a general fast, and that they should every one put on sackcloth, but they all did turn from their evil ways, and from the wickedness that was in their hands. (Jonas iii. 5, 10.) But above all other, the history of Zaccheus is most notable; for being come unto our Saviour Jesus Christ, he did say, *Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any man or taken aught away by extortion, or fraud, I do restore him fourfold.* (Luke xix. 8.) Here we see that after his repentance, he was no more the man that he was before, but was clean changed and altered. It

was so far off that he would continue and abide still in his unsatiabie covetousness, or take aught away fraudulently from any man, that rather he was most willing and ready to give away his own, and to make satisfaction unto all them that he had done injury and wrong unto. Here may we right well add the sinful woman, which, when she came to our Saviour Jesus Christ, did pour down such abundance of tears out of those wanton eyes of hers, wherewith she had allured many unto folly, that she did with them wash his feet, wiping them with the hairs of her head, which she was wont most gloriously to set out, making of them a net of the devil. (Luke vii. 37, 38.)

Hereby we do learn, what is the satisfaction that God doth require of us; which is, that we cease from evil, and do good [Isa. i. 16, 17]; and, if we have done any man wrong, to endeavour ourselves to make him true amends to the utmost of our power, following in this the example of Zaccheus, and of this sinful woman, and also that goodly lesson that John Baptist Zacharias' son, did give unto them that came to ask counsel of him. [Luke iii. 8 & seq.]. This was commonly the penance that Christ enjoined sinners; *Go thy way and sin no more.* (John v. 14: [viii. II].) Which penance we shall never be able to fulfil, without the special grace of him that doth say, *Without me ye can do nothing.* (John xv. 5.) It is therefore our parts, if at least we be desirous of the health and salvation of our own selves, most earnestly to pray unto our heavenly Father, to assist us with his Holy Spirit, that we may be able to hearken unto the voice of the true Shepherd, and with due obedience to follow the same.

Let us hearken to the voice of Almighty God, when he calleth us to repentance; let us not harden our hearts, as such infidels do, who abuse the time given them of God to repent, and turn it to continue their pride and contempt against God and man; which know not how much they heap God's wrath upon themselves, for the hardness of their hearts, which cannot repent at the day of vengeance. Where we have offended the law of God, let us repent us of our straying from so good a Lord. Let us confess our unworthiness before him; but yet let us trust in God's free mercy for Christ's sake, for the pardon of the same. And from henceforth let us endeavour ourselves to walk in a new life, as new-born babes, whereby we may glorify our Father which is in heaven, and thereby to bear in our consciences a good testimony of our faith: so at the last, to obtain the fruition of everlasting life, through the merits of our Saviour: to whom be all praise and honour for ever.
Amen.

[Extract from certain Sermons or Homilies appointed to be read in Churches in the time of the late Queen Elizabeth of famous Memory, with an Index of subjects and names, and a table of texts of Scripture. Suitable prayers and parallel passages from various works of authority. Published by the Prayer Book and Homily Society, Adam Street, Strand, London. 1852.]