

FROM THE INHERITANCE OF OUR FATHERS

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MOURNING OVER THE PIERCED MESSIAH

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William Young was born in Brooklyn, New York, on May 9, 1918. He excelled in his studies and entered Columbia University in 1934, at age 16. He also earned degrees from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and Union Theological Seminary in New York City. He went on to teach philosophy at Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana, and then at the University of Rhode Island. He has also served as the pastor of the Presbyterian Reformed Church of East Greenwich, Rhode Island.

Dr. Young was graced by God to possess that rare combination of great academic ability and great piety at the same time. His sermons are exegetical, experiential, and practical. His learning is hidden behind their simplicity.

In this booklet we have combined Dr. Young's two sermons on Zechariah 12:10 into one.

Mourning Over the Pierced Messiah

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced. And they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. —ZECHARIAH 12:10

Looking Upon the Pierced Christ

Not all things in the Word of God are equally plain and clear. We have been attempting to consider a portion of the Book of Revelation, which, as is well known, is a most difficult book of the Bible to understand. And yet one does find every now and then, at least a glimmering

of light, sometimes a marvelous flood of light dawning, as one struggles with difficult portions of the Word of God. If you find that some chapters and verses of the Bible are hard to understand, pray that the Spirit of God might give you light. I don't forbid consulting the commentaries, but you are apt to find, if you consult more than one of the commentaries, especially on these difficult passages, that the interpreters will present diverse views, which when compared with one another might simply make for "confusion worse confounded."¹ It is the Spirit of God who must shed light upon all of the Word of God—especially the difficult passages.²

Now in the book of Zechariah there is much that is hard to understand. In part at least, it is the same kind of difficulty that

1. John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), ii, l. 996.

2. Westminster Confession of Faith, I, VI; 1 Corinthians 2:9–12.

one finds in the book of Revelation—that is, you’ve got visions in both books. And these visions are set down in the Bible in figurative language. To decipher these figures one really has to have a very thorough and comprehensive understanding of the entire Bible, where there are hints given to the meaning at least of some of these mysterious symbols expressed in the language of Scripture. But one passage that shines out in the book of Zechariah among others is our text: “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced.” In these words we will consider first, the One that is pierced; secondly, the “looking upon” the One that is pierced; and thirdly, the source or the cause of that “looking upon” the One that “they have pierced.”

One of the great difficulties in understanding the language of the Bible is the question, how much of Scripture is to be taken literally and how much is to be understood figuratively? Even, one could say, how much is to be understood spiritually, and not simply according to the letter of the word? Happily, with regard to this text, we have New Testament light, where this text is referred to and is interpreted. We find this is in the Gospel according to John, in the account of the crucifixion of Christ: "Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that

the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look upon him whom they pierced" (John 19:32–37). You see, the piercing of the Savior's side by the soldier's spear is set forth as the fulfillment of the words of our text, as John cites it: "they shall look upon him whom they pierced." So from this, we certainly can conclude that the Lord Jesus Christ is the one who is pierced, referred to by our text.

Now the text itself not only says that they look on *Him* whom they pierced. But it is in the first person singular: "I will pour upon the house of David..." and then, "they shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced." Who is the speaker here? Well, the opening verse of the chapter makes it very clear that Jehovah is the speaker. In verse 1 we read: "The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the

heavens, and layeth the foundations of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him." The word rendered "LORD" here in capital letters, in our Authorized Version, is none other than the name, "Jehovah." It is Jehovah "which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him." This is the One who is speaking, that says, "they look upon me whom they have pierced." Now how can Jehovah, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Preserver of that which He has created, be the One whom they have pierced? Incidentally, it may be observed that the preservation of the heavens and the earth is put in the present tense: "which *stretcheth forth* the heavens and *layeth* the foundation of the earth." The preservation of the earth is represented as a continuous creation here. Not that it is preceded by nothing, as the first creation was, but it's the same almighty power in

any case that created the heavens and the earth, that preserves them from moment to moment.

Now, how can One who is the Creator and the Preserver of all creation be changed? And how can such a One be pierced? How can such a One die? I know that you have blasphemous theologians that talk about the death of God, but there's a profound depth here when Jehovah says, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced." Well, the answer is that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The Lord Jesus Christ, of whom this verse speaks, is both God and man. As man, He could be pierced and He was pierced. As man, He gave his life. He laid down His life for His sheep (John 10:15, 17-18). So we see then the identification of the piercing of Christ with His crucifixion

and, as we sing in Psalm 22, “They pierced my hands and my feet.”³ John, to be sure, speaks of the piercing of the Savior’s side by the spear. David, in Psalm 22, speaks of the crucifixion itself, when he speaks of the piercing of those sacred hands and feet of the Savior. But both have in mind the shedding of the blood of the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8), when mention here is made of the One that was “pierced.”

But now we have, secondly, the “looking upon” the One that is pierced: “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced.” Notice that it is not just in the words of my outline, looking upon *the One that is pierced*, but looking upon the One whom they have pierced. We will come back to that in a little while. Let’s first consider this word, “looking.” Of course, it’s not looking with the physical eye. It is

3. Psalm 22:16, Scottish Psalter of 1650.

true that John, as well as the Virgin Mary and others, did see the event of the crucifixion of Christ with their physical eyes. But this is not a prophecy of such physical vision. "Vision" is itself a kind of figure of speech sometimes in the Bible, as well as in other writers; even writers like Plato, for example, take "vision" as a symbol or representation of the understanding of the mind. It's pure thought often in view when one pictures the working of the mind as similar to the working of the eye, when we "see" in the ordinary sense of the term.

But here it's not just pure thought that "seeing" or "looking" signifies. What is meant by "looking" is the looking of faith, the act of believing. And in this faith there are two things. One is knowledge. You have to know what it is you believe, if you believe in something. You can't believe without believing something. You can't believe that something, unless you know

what that something is that you believe. So knowledge of this sort, in the understanding of the meaning of that which you believe, is the most fundamental and basic ingredient in faith. The other thing in faith is *to believe*, that is fundamentally, to give assent. To say yes, but not saying yes merely with the lips, with an audible sound, or writing that which one professes to believe, but to say it within the heart. Just go back to the words of Paul in Romans 10:9: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." That "believing in thine heart" is what is signified here by "looking," when one looks upon Him whom one has pierced.

I may insert this remark at this point. A person might have a whole lot of knowledge, as I suppose that some of the destructive rationalistic higher critics have of the Bible, who have known

and do know a lot about the contents of the Bible. They probably have a great deal more knowledge about what's in the Bible than many humble Christians, who are truly children of God, have. But the great difference here is, though they have all this knowledge of the Word of God, they don't believe it to be true. I'm not praising ignorance, but I must say, that a simple Christian whose knowledge of the revelation of God may be very defective, but who really believes it, is in an entirely different position than that of the person who may have a great deal of knowledge, but no faith. Don't ask me how little a person might need to believe in order to be saved. I don't know the answer to that question, nor even if it's a meaningful question that has an answer to be given. But I will say this: a person who does have faith, even "as a grain of mustard seed" (Matt. 17:20), wants to know more and more (1 Peter 2:2-3). The

true Christian doesn't examine himself to find out whether or not he has the mere minimum that's necessary to be counted as a child of God. But the true Christian wants to know more and more. He is grasping at the maximum rather than at the minimum of doctrinal knowledge. Doctrinal knowledge isn't to be separated from genuine experience of the truth that one believes.

Now this also in a way brings us back to the question that I alluded to previously about the literal and figurative interpretation. Is this passage a literal prophecy with regard to the Jews? Or is this passage to be spiritualized, and seen to refer, in a general way, to the experience of every child of God, whether Jew or Gentile? And would it apply to the New Testament as well as to the Old? These words have often been understood, and I have repeatedly used them myself, especially in prayer, with regard to the future

conversion of the Jews as the nation of Israel (Rom. 10:1). It is a sad state today, as it has been since the time of the crucifixion of the Lord, that the Jewish nation, as such, has not recognized Jesus of Nazareth as their own promised Messiah, and have shown their enmity, not only in the crucifixion of Christ, but in their persecution, first of the apostles and then of those converted at the Day of Pentecost, right down to the present day when you have the threats of legislation being made in Palestine against Christian missionaries proclaiming the gospel to Jewish people.

But what a glorious promise is given to us in Romans 11, which I believe plainly teaches that the day is coming when the branches that have been cut off because of unbelief will be once again grafted on to their own olive tree (Rom. 11:12–32). When the Jewish people as a whole—I don't say every single individual but the great mass of the nation—individually

and officially, will acknowledge Jesus as their promised Messiah when they will “look upon him whom they have pierced,” and when they will mourn, which is intimated in the latter part of the verse, and in the verses that follow.

So I would not want for a moment to leave Israel, the Jewish people, out of the picture any more than the apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost did in connection with a text that is kindred to our text from the prophet Joel. Peter in Acts 2:16 says: “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams,” and so on, culminating in verse 21 with the blessed words: “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” I would

see this more literal reference to the Jewish people, first of all in the conversion of so many hundreds of them on the Day of Pentecost, and less spectacularly, in the conversion of those of Israel's race who belong to the election of grace through the ages, and then the blossoming out of the work of the Spirit of God among them in the latter-day glory, when "all Israel shall be saved." But while that is the case, and I wouldn't want to minimize it for a moment, I think that the words of our text do have at least a spiritual application, if not a basic figurative sense as their meaning. Whether you take it as basically a prophecy about Israel, and see an application for Christians in general, or whether you take it fundamentally as a teaching about Christians in general, and then see the promises with regard to the nation of Israel as being a specific instance of both the literal and the figurative, both are to be seen in this verse.

I would like to say a few things about the spiritual significance of the words, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced." This must be the very heart of saving faith for any sinner that is translated out of darkness into the marvelous light of the gospel. The soul is effectually called by the work of God's grace, and must say, maybe not in these literal words, but must express itself in this sense that, "I am the one that pierced the bleeding Savior. I am the one that pressed the crown of thorns upon His head. I am the one that drove the nails into His hands and feet, nailing Him to the cross. And I am the one that has pierced His side by the spear of my sins and my transgressions." This is the mark of saving faith that has within it true evangelical repentance that accompanies such faith. It is not only the sense that one has violated the holy law of God and has come under the wrath of God by one's transgression, but it is from

the sense and sight of the crucified Savior pierced by one's own sin as described by John Newton.

I saw one hanging on the tree,
In agony and blood,
He fix'd his languid eyes on me,
As near his cross I stood.

And then Newton goes on to portray the sense of sin felt by the convicted one, who feels that he has slain the Lord. Then comes the verse that speaks of the Lord's giving a "second look":

A second look he gave, which said,
I freely all forgive;
This blood is for thy ransom paid;
I die, that thou mayest live.⁴

Newton's conclusion sets forth the wonder that the piercing of the Savior turns out to be the very thing that has procured the believer's deliverance from sin, and

4. John Newton, Hymn 57, *Olney Hymns* (1779).

from the wrath of God. Here is saving faith in the crucified Savior, and here's the secret also of evangelical repentance. For, "they look upon him whom they have pierced."

Finally, the conclusion is given in the first words of the verse, that is, the cause of this "looking." It's the pouring out of "the Spirit of grace and of supplications" that produces in the sinner this looking upon the One whom he has pierced. I will not dwell in any detail upon the words, but will only point out that it is the person of the Holy Spirit who is the source of saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who is the source of the true repentance that is not to be repented of (2 Cor. 7:10). What the Lord works in every sinner saved by grace is expressed in the reference to the "pouring out of the spirit of grace and of supplications." Some commentators, including Calvin, have proposed other renderings than "supplications,"

but supplication is the result of the pouring out of the Spirit of grace. It's the grace of God that calls forth from the heart the cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:3).

It is not just at the first moment of one's conversion that one prays that prayer. That prayer is uttered throughout the whole course of the Christian's experience, even up to his deathbed. Do you see what true faith is? What this true looking is? It's not looking at a crucifix. It's not looking at a surrealist painting by Salvador Dali, "Christ of St. John of the Cross" (1951), up in the air. No, that's not faith. You may have some kind of emotional experience. You might even break out with a flood of tears, but that's not faith. And neither is it faith when at Whitefield's preaching in the revival at Cambuslang, near Glasgow in Scotland, in 1742, some people had mental images of Christ crucified. A mental image of a man on a cross

is not saving faith in the crucified One. This phenomenon gave occasion to Ralph Erskine (1685–1752) to write his great book, *Faith No Fancy*,⁵ in which he goes into the error that supposing that all of our thoughts, and particularly faith with regard to invisible things, are based upon mental images and on reproductions of sensation. But over against that error in theory and the practical emotionalism that may accompany even a true work of the Spirit of God in the awakening and reviving of souls, saving faith is the result of a supernatural act of the Spirit of God. The great question then is, have I that faith? Have I looked upon the One

5. Ralph Erskine, *Faith no fancy, or, A treatise of mental images: discovering the vain philosophy and vile divinity of a late pamphlet intituled Mr. Robe's fourth letter to Mr. Fisher, and shewing that an imaginary idea of Christ as man (when supposed to belong to saving faith, whether in its act or object), imports nothing but ignorance, atheism, idolatry, great falsehood, and gross delusion...* (Philadelphia: William M'Culloch, 1805).

whom I have pierced? And do I have therefore eternal life? May the Lord grant His blessing.

Godly Sorrow and Repentance unto Life

The Spirit of Christ in the Old Testament prophets testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow (1 Peter 1:10–11). So Zechariah in our text speaks of the suffering Savior, and also of the fruit of His work in the faith and repentance of those that He redeemed. In this verse we have noted that there is especially a reference to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:6, 15:24), and in it we have the deepest mourning set forth. We may consider this mourning, first, literally, in connection with the conversion of the Jewish people. Secondly, spiritually, in the repentance of all the elect. And thirdly, we may take note in the entire text of the inseparable character of repentance and faith, and in

particular, the fact that true repentance is a result of saving faith.

Now first, we'll look at the text literally. As such, it has reference to the Jewish people spoken of as the "house of David" and "the inhabitants of Jerusalem." It sets forth the consequence of the pouring out in abundance, and graciously, of the Spirit of God upon the Jewish people, and that, I believe, with particular reference to the future conversion of the nation when "they shall look upon him whom they pierced" (John 19:37). In consequence of that look, "they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." This will be the condition of Israel in the latter days, taking these latter days to be the days which may last for a very long time prior to the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory. Saving faith in the crucified One

is the basis for the deepest mourning of repentance unto life.

Now the intensity of the sorrow that will be expressed when Israel turns to the Lord is indicated by the figure of one mourning for his only son, and of one "being in bitterness for his firstborn." There can be no greater grief nor more bitter sorrow than that which rises from the loss of one's firstborn, or one's only son. This is expressed in various portions of the Word of God, as in Jeremiah 6:26: "O daughter of my people, gird thee with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in ashes: make thee mourning, as for an only son, most bitter lamentation: for the spoiler shall suddenly come upon us." And again, Jeremiah 31:9, "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is

my firstborn." Likewise, Amos 8:10, says: "And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day." This is the powerful figure of speech used to represent the mourning, the sorrow, and the repentance of the Jewish people when they will turn from their unbelief to put their faith in Christ as the Messiah. They will turn away from their rebellion against the counsel of God (Luke 7:30), and come to embrace Him whom they have spurned, when their eyes are opened to "look upon him whom they have pierced."

One could enumerate the various matters which the Jewish people will find as causes and occasions for their mourning. Most explicitly, according to the text, it is their guilt in the crucifixion of the Lord of

glory (1 Cor. 2:7–8). Now I know that it is not polite nowadays to bring the charge against the Jewish people of having crucified the Lord Jesus Christ. But though it may be considered as out of place, even on the part perhaps of the pope of Rome to make such allegations, nonetheless, what saith the Scripture? What did the apostle Peter say to his Jewish audience on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:22? “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” That was plain talk upon the part of the apostle Peter, that those whom he addressed of Jewish descent by wicked hands had crucified and slain Jesus of Nazareth. But someone might say, wasn’t

it a Gentile soldier that pierced Jesus with the spear? Well, that is true, but who instigated the death and the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ? Was it not the Jewish mob that cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him” (John 19:6)? And this, at the instigation of the chief priests and rulers, whether of the sect of the Pharisees or of the Sadducees (Matt. 27:41–43; Mark 15:11, 31–32).

Or shall one say that this was a long time ago, even two millennia that have passed since the time of the crucifixion of Christ. But let’s not forget this, that there is such a thing as corporate responsibility. This is something that had been drummed into the Jewish people by the law of Moses, and by the prophets, that the iniquities of the fathers are visited upon the children (Exod. 20:5). They understood the idea that the nation has been guilty and that this guilt rests upon the members of the guilty nation, even upon their posterity from generation to generation. It’s

a fearful thing. This is a principle that applies not only to the Jews, but is no less true with respect to the Gentiles, that the iniquity of the parents is visited upon the children “unto the third and fourth generation.” And it can be more than the third and fourth generation. The Jewish people throughout the ages have indicated their approval of the crime of the crucifixion of the Lord of glory; so the appropriateness of the words, “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced and they shall mourn for him.”

Observe incidentally the change of the person of the pronoun in the first part of the text, “they shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced.” We saw last time that it is the God-man that is the One who made this statement, that He is indeed truly God, but He is also truly man and in His human nature He could be pierced and put to death. But now in the second part of the text the pronoun changes to

the third person, "they shall mourn for *him*," which is not an unusual thing in the Hebrew style of writing, to have a change of pronoun from one person to another.

But if we come back to the mourning of the converted people of Israel, it is not only the crucifixion of Christ that they will remember, and their responsibility in the matter, but also there is the persecution of the apostles and of the primitive Christians, as recorded in the Book of Acts, for which the people were also responsible and which contributed to the final judgment in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD. There will be mourning also for the continued rebellion throughout the ages against the gospel, and the hatred of the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ, which sadly persists among the Jewish people to this day. I need not go into the persecutions and the designs of the orthodox Jews and others against missionary work in the state of

Israel today. If one reads the reports given in *Mission to Israel* one sees the fragility of the cause of the gospel in that nation at present, and the organized hostility to the witness of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. One may say indeed that one sees something of the force of these figures of mourning as for an only son and for the firstborn representing the expression of the penitence of Israel in that day.

One can add there will be repentance for the way in which this very text has been corrupted and misinterpreted by the Jews in their opposition to Christianity. There have been two devices that have been used, and sometimes Christian interpreters have swallowed the sophisticated arguments that have been given by the rabbinical interpreters from the time of the Middle Ages with regard to this text. First, the pronoun "me" in the words, "they shall look upon me whom they have

pierced," has been a great embarrassment to the Jewish interpreters. That God should speak of Himself in these terms seems to be wrong. It seems that even before the appearance of Christ there was perhaps a difficulty felt. How could the eternal and unchangeable God, the Creator of heaven and earth, be pierced? This does not seem to be right, and therefore the textual critics, even among the Jews, will say that this cannot be the right reading. There must have been a mistake by the copyists of the manuscripts. The manuscripts should really have a third person pronoun, even as there is in the later part of the verse. You find in the Masoretic scrolls from the ninth century AD that the reading in the text appears just as we translate it with the first person pronoun, but in the margin, giving what should be read as distinct from what is written in the text, they put the third person. Later in the course of the centuries the third

person was put into some of the manuscripts of the text itself. But there was at least this much honesty on the part of the Masoretic scribes that they did not tamper with what was actually written in the text, even though they were of the opinion that something else should have been written, and indicated that in the margin.

Another device has been to take the verb “to be pierced” to be understood not in a literal sense, but in a figurative sense. Even Calvin in his commentary seems to give in at this point.⁶ Calvin is well aware of the fact that the verse is quoted in the Gospel of John as being fulfilled when our Savior’s side was pierced, and he does see a remarkable providence of God in the literal fulfillment of the “looking upon him whom they have pierced” in the death of

6. John Calvin, “Zechariah,” *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, trans. John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849), 5:364; see also editor’s footnote 1.

Christ. But with respect to the Jews previously, he takes the verb "to be pierced" as being a figurative expression for grieving God by one's sin and iniquity. Whatever has been the way in which this text has been handled particularly by the rabbinical interpreters, here too is something over which the Jewish people can well mourn in the day of their conversion to the gospel.

But while there are all of these matters that can give an occasion for mourning upon the part of the Jewish people, their greatest cause for mourning is the same cause that every Gentile will have when he looks upon Him whom he has pierced and mourns. I may just incidentally remark that the Jewish people strike me as being very much conscious of their distinctiveness as Jews, that they have descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is what is foremost in their minds, but that they descended from Adam and from

Noah, this is something that they admit, of course, but which does not have the same degree of importance for them. But the evils that have been done by the Jewish race especially in the crucifixion of Christ, are not the most fundamental or the most basic of evils. The basic evil is sin. Sin is sin, whether it is the sin of the Jew or the sin of the Gentile. And when one looks upon Him whom one has pierced, it is indeed by one's sin that one has pierced the Savior. This is what gives rise to true repentance.

Now we come to the second point, namely, that the deepest mourning is what has been called evangelical repentance. Repentance can be understood in various ways, and it is understood in various ways in Scripture. One fundamental element in repentance is certainly sorrow for sin, and that element comes out very strongly in our text in the mention of bitter mourning. But there can be sorrow occasioned by sin that is a "sorrow

unto death." The sorrow of the world, we are told, is sorrow unto death. And this is contrasted with "godly sorrow" that "worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death," as we read in 2 Corinthians 7:10.

There was sorrow on the part of Cain after he was confronted by the Lord with the murder of his brother Abel. What was Cain sorrowing about? He says, "My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Gen. 4:13). If a person has felt the unpleasant consequences of his sin and is sorrowful because of his punishment, this is not godly sorrow for sin. Whether it is being found out by human beings, and receiving the rebuke, and physical and mental punishment that is allotted to them by those in power that disapprove of his actions, or whether in a more spiritual sense, a convinced sinner, out of fear of the judgment of God in this life, and above all, the fear of

being cast into hell after death, is sorrowful that he has exposed himself to these things; this is not godly sorrow that brings repentance unto life along with it. It is the sorrow of the world that worketh death.

You have it not only in the case of Cain but you have something that comes far short of true evangelical repentance in the case of King Saul, with respect to his enmity against David (1 Sam. 24:16–17, 26:21), and in the case of Judas after he had betrayed his Master with a kiss (Matt. 27:3–5). But the godly sorrow that is a part of repentance unto life is a sorrow that does not come merely by the working of conscience, even when conscience is aroused by the threatenings and the curse of a broken law. Thus, we must make a difference here between legal repentance on the one hand, and evangelical repentance on the other. I would not minimize the importance of the law of God in setting forth what sin is. “By the

law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20b). I would also not minimize the fact that it is a good thing that the law does reveal one's sin and one's guilt, and can give rise to a certain kind of repentance. But the repentance that arises from the revelation of the law, as to what God commands and what God forbids, that repentance has to be sanctified by the influence of the gospel in order to bring forth repentance unto life.

That brings us to the last point, that evangelical repentance cannot be separated from saving faith. It is indeed a fruit of faith. Even so far as the law plays a part in the experience of the Christian, the mind of the convinced sinner is enlightened by the Spirit of God to see the law as the law of God, and to see one's sin, as sin against God. But the enlightenment of the mind of the converted sinner in the knowledge of sin, is never separated from the enlightenment of the mind in

the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and particularly in the great manifestation of the love of Christ when He offered Himself as a sacrifice to pay the debt of sin (John 15:13).

That evangelical repentance is a fruit of faith is clear in the teaching of our text: “They will look upon him whom they have pierced.” There’s a look, that’s faith, and then you have the mourning and grief, as for an only son, or as for a firstborn. I know that sometimes you have repentance mentioned prior to faith, as the apostle Paul said to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:20–21). But that doesn’t mean that there has to be a repentance first of all, before one can believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Far from it! There is never a separation of the principle, you might say, of faith infused by the gracious work of the Holy Ghost, and the principle of evangelical repentance. There is no such thing as an “impenitent

believer," and neither is there any such thing as an "unbelieving penitent."

Wherever there is repentance, there is also faith, and wherever there is faith, there is repentance. There is an order, however; but it is not a question of time. There is an order that our text intimates, and that is, faith is the first fruit, so to speak, of the working of the Spirit of God. But immediately, so far as time is concerned, the tears of repentance flow as a consequence of looking upon Him whom one has pierced (Luke 22:61–62).

I may say a word about tears. Some have raised a question that the constitution of some individuals is such that they simply do not cry actual tears, and yet they can be truly sorry for wrongdoing and truly penitent. I do not want to deny that for a moment. But if a person can shed tears upon the loss of an only son, or of a firstborn, then a person who is capable of that should also be capable of shedding

tears because of his sin against God. The fundamental point here is set forth in the Shorter Catechism, when repentance unto life is spoken of not only as involving grief for sin and hatred of sin, but also as proceeding from the “apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ.”⁷ This is the secret of true repentance that does issue in the spiritual and eternal life of the soul.

I would make just two remarks in closing. One is the absolute necessity of repentance. This was illustrated by the words of our Lord Jesus Christ when He spoke about the falling of the tower of Siloam upon some people. He asked whether these people were worse than others that they should receive such a visitation of God’s judgment. Christ then answered His own question, saying, “I say unto you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:1–5).

7. Shorter Catechism, Q. 87.

Without repentance there is only eternal death for the soul. Secondly, not only must a sinner repent, if he is to be saved, but with repentance, there is the consequence of everlasting life and blessedness. There is blessedness about repentance. Is it not so, in the words of our Lord Jesus in the Beatitudes? "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4).

Looking at the Cross

1. In evil long I took delight,
Unaw'd by shame or fear,
Till a new object struck my sight
And stopp'd my wild career.
2. I saw one hanging on a tree,
In agony and blood.
Who fix'd His languid eyes on me,
As near His cross I stood.
3. Sure, never till my latest breath,
Can I forget that look;
It seemed to charge me with His death,
Though not a word He spoke.
4. My conscience felt, and own'd the guilt
And plung'd me in despair;
I saw my sins His blood had spilt,
And helped to nail Him there.

5. A second look He gave, which said,
I freely all forgive;
This blood is for thy ransom paid,
I die, that thou mayest live.
6. Thus, while His death my sin displays,
In all its blackest hue,
(Such is the mystery of grace),
It seals my pardon too.
7. With pleasing grief and mournful joy,
My spirit now is fill'd,
That I should such a life destroy,
Yet live by Him I killed.

—John Newton, Hymn 57,
Olney Hymns (1779).

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt o'er all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God,
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet;
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

His dying crimson, like a robe,
Spreads o'er His body on the tree;
Then am I dead to all the globe,
And all the globe is dead to me.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

—Isaac Watts

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