

Joy in Heaven Over Repenting Sinners

Edward Payson

"There is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth." Luke 15:10

Though eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him, yet, for our encouragement and consolation, he has revealed theta to us by his Spirit in his word. He there sets open before us the door of heaven, and invites faith to enter in, survey her future inheritance, and contemplate the joys and employments of those happy beings, to a participation of whose felicity she is conducting us. Let us, my hearers, comply with this invitation. Let us look in at the open door, which the condescending goodness of our God has set before us; feast our eyes with a view of untreated glories, and refresh our ears with the hallelujahs of the heavenly host. If we have that faith which is the evidence of things not seen, and which enables its possessors to endure as seeing Him who is invisible, we shall see the eternal King bending forward on his awful throne, and contemplating some object in this lower world with looks of ineffable complacency and delight. We shall see the Son of God, standing with open arms and a countenance full of invitation, compassion and love; —we shall see all heaven in a transport of joy, and hear its high courts resounding with the songs and praises of its blessed inhabitants. Is it asked, what occasions their joy? A sinner, perhaps some sinner in this assembly, has just repented. This is the object which God contemplates with complacency and delight; for to this man, says he, will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word. This is he, whom the Son of God opens his arms to receive; for, whosoever cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out. This is what fills heaven with new joy, and calls forth from angelic lips their loudest songs of praise; for he who came down from heaven has assured us that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. This declaration of our Saviour, naturally leads us to inquire who rejoice, and why they rejoice on such an occasion.

I. Who rejoice?

In answer to this inquiry, I observe,

1. That God the Father rejoices over every sinner that repenteth.

That the infinite and ever blessed Jehovah, before whom all nations are as nothing and vanity, should rejoice in the repentance of a sinful worm of the dust,

appears at first view, strange, and almost incredible. But however strange or incredible it may appear, it is evident, both from his declarations and his conduct, that such is the fact.

It is evident from his declarations. His word informs us, that when he saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was evil continually, it repented him that he had made man, and it grieved him at the heart. But if he was grieved at man's apostasy, he cannot but rejoice when any of our apostate race repent, and return to him and happiness. Agreeably, we find him most solemnly declaring, that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn from his way and live. After foretelling, by the mouth of his prophets, the repentance and return of his ancient people, who had forsaken him to worship idols, he says, —Then shalt thou be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God; for the Lord delighteth in thee and thy land shall be married; and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee. For behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing and my people a joy, and I will rejoice in Jerusalem and joy in my people. Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all thine heart, O daughter of Jerusalem, for the Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save; he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing. These striking declarations, addressed by Jehovah to his ancient people, are equally applicable to penitent sinners in every age, and undeniably prove that he rejoices in their conversion.

That he does so is farther evident from his actions. To glorify his grace in the salvation of sinners, has apparently been the great object of all his dispensations, from the fall of man till the present day. It would be easy to show, that for this purpose the world has been preserved, and the race of men continued. For this purpose the various revolutions, wars and commotions which stain the page of history have been overruled. But these are trifles. For this purpose God gave up his only begotten Son, and sent down the Holy Spirit from heaven; and for the same purpose he is still sending forth his ambassadors to beseech sinners in Christ's stead to be reconciled to himself. That he rejoices when they comply with the terms of reconciliation, is evident from the manner in which he receives them, as represented to us in the parable of the prodigal son. No sooner does he perceive them returning from the service and ways of sin, than he hastens to meet and welcome them; clothes them with the robe of his Son's righteousness; puts upon them the ring of his everlasting covenant; causes their feet to be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; feeds them with the bread and water of life, and calls upon all the inhabitants of heaven to rejoice with him, because his lost children are found.

2. The Son of God rejoices over every sinner that repenteth.

Were it necessary to prove the truth of this assertion, we might remind you, that whatsoever things the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. We might remind you, that in the history of our Saviour we read of his rejoicing but once; and his joy was then excited by reflections on the sovereign grace of his Father in bringing sinners to repentance, and in hiding the great truths of the gospel from the wise and prudent, while he revealed them to babes. But it is not necessary to prove the truth of this assertion. It is not necessary to prove, that the friend of man, the compassionate Jesus, rejoices when sinners repent. His whole life was one continued proof of this. Is it possible that he who toiled, prayed, suffered and died for sinful men, should not rejoice in their conversion? Must not he who, once and again, wept at the sight of their miseries, and cheerfully poured out his blood for their salvation, even while they were his enemies, be almost ready to shed tears of joy over them, when by repentance they become his friends? Yes, he must rejoice, and he does rejoice over them with joy unspeakable; a joy which he only can feel, and of which he alone can conceive. This was a principal part of the joy set before him, for the sake of which he endured the cross and despised the shame; and it probably constitutes no inconsiderable part of the happiness which he now enjoys in heaven. Though there is no reason to doubt that the Holy Spirit participates in the joy of the Father and the Son, yet as the Scriptures are silent respecting it we shall only add,

3. That the blessed angels rejoice over every sinner that repenteth.

That these benevolent spirits take an interest in our affairs, and feel tenderly concerned for our welfare, is evident from various parts of revelation. When they came to bring the glad tidings of our Saviour's birth, they joyfully ascribed glory to God in the highest, that there was peace on earth and good will to men. They are also represented as styling themselves our brethren and fellow servants; as having a charge over God's people to keep them in all their ways, and as going forth to minister unto the heirs of salvation. From these and other passages we might have justly inferred, even if our Saviour had not assured us of the fact, that these happy beings rejoice over every sinner who repenteth.

II. Why do the inhabitants of heaven rejoice over repenting sinners?

So far as this inquiry respects the motives of Jehovah's conduct, it becomes us to answer it with reverence and humility, lest we should darken counsel by words without knowledge. It is however certain, that God does not rejoice in the repentance of sinners, because it can add any thing to his essential happiness or glory; for he is already infinitely glorious and, happy, and so would continue though all the men on earth, and all the angels in heaven should madly rush into hell. Is it any profit to the Almighty that thou art righteous, or is it any gain to him that thou makest thy ways perfect? No, our goodness extendeth not to him, and when we have done all, we are but unprofitable servants. Why then does God rejoice when we repent? He rejoices,

1. Because his eternal purposes of grace, and his engagements to his Son, are then fulfilled. We learn from the Scriptures, that all who repent, were chosen by him in Christ Jesus before the world began, and given to him as his people in the covenant of redemption. We also learn, that he has said to his Son, Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power. He therefore rejoices to see them repent, as we rejoice when our promises are fulfilled, and our favorite purposes accomplished.

2. God rejoices when sinners repent, because bringing them to repentance is his own work. It is a consequence of the gift of his Son, and is effected by the power of his Spirit. The Scriptures inform us, that he rejoices in all his works, and with reason does he rejoice in them; for they are all very good. But if he rejoices in his other works, much more may he rejoice in this, since it is of all his works the greatest, the most glorious, and the most worthy of himself. In this work the image of Satan is effaced, and the image of God restored to an immortal soul. In this work, a child of wrath is transformed into an heir of glory. In this work, a smoking brand is plucked from eternal fires, and planted among the stars in the firmament of heaven, there to shine with increasing lustre forever and ever. And is not this a work worthy of God, a work in which God may with propriety rejoice?

3. God rejoices in the repentance of sinners, because it affords him an opportunity to exercise mercy and show his love to Christ, by pardoning them for his sake. Christ is his beloved Son in whom he is ever well pleased. He loves him as he loves himself, with an infinite love; a love which is as inconceivable by us, as his creative power and eternal duration. He loves him not only on account of the near relation and inseparable union which subsists between them, but for the perfect holiness and excellence of his character, and especially for the infinite benevolence which he displayed in undertaking and accomplishing the great work of man's redemption. As it is the nature of love to manifest itself in acts of kindness toward the beloved object, God cannot but wish to display his love for Christ, and to show all intelligent beings how perfectly he is pleased with his character and conduct, as Mediator. The inexhaustible fountain of love to Christ, which fills his heart, is constantly seeking new channels in which it may flow out and display itself to creatures. As David asked, Is there yet alive any of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan's sake? so we may conceive of God as asking, Is there yet any penitent sinner, to whom I may show kindness for the sake of Christ? And when such a sinner is found, God cannot but be pleased, because it affords him an opportunity to display his love for Christ, by bestowing pardon from respect to his atonement and intercession. The Scriptures also inform us, that the Lord delighteth in mercy. He must therefore be gratified when he has an opportunity to exercise it. But such an opportunity none but penitent sinners afford him; for those who continue impenitent, will not ask for mercy; they will not even accept it when offered; they almost consider the offer itself as an insult. When told that God is willing to forgive them for the sake of Christ, they practically reply, what have we done that needs forgiving? We have injured no one. We are not like others, extortioners, adulterers or unjust. We can

be saved without forgiveness through Christ. Insult us not then with offers of pardon, as if we were criminals, but carry them to sinners, to profligates, who have need of mercy. It is needless to remark, that God cannot consistently forgive sinners while they possess this self-justifying temper. But when they exchange this temper for a contrite heart, and begin to cry; God be merciful to us sinners, he can with propriety gratify himself, and manifest his love to Christ, by exercising toward them that mercy which he delights to display.

4. God rejoices when sinners repent; because it gratifies him to see them escape from the tyranny, and from the consequences of sin. God is light; perfect holiness. God is love; pure benevolence. His holiness and his benevolence both prompt him to rejoice, when sinners escape from sin. Sin is that abominable thing which he hates. He hates it as an evil or malignant, and as a bitter, or destructive thing. It is indeed both. It is the plague, the leprosy, the death of intelligent creatures. It infects and poisons all their faculties; plunges them into the lowest depths of guilt and wretchedness, and pollutes them with a stain, which all the waters of the ocean cannot wash away, which all the fires of hell cannot remove; from which nothing can cleanse them, but the blood of Christ. Such is the malignity of its nature, that could it gain admittance into the celestial regions, it would instantly transform angels to devils, and turn heaven into hell. That this is no exaggerated representation, sin melancholy experience but too clearly evinces. Already has sin transformed angels to devils; already has it converted this world from a paradise to a prison; from a habitation of immortals, to an Aceldama and a Golgotha, a place of skulls and a field of blood. Already has it poisoned not only our bodies, but our souls; it has brought death into the world and all our woe, and,

"in one hour,
Spoil'd six days' labor of a God:"

Even now it stalks through our subjugated world with gigantic strides, spreading ruin and wretchedness around in ten thousand forms. Strife and discord, war and bloodshed, famine and pestilence, pain and sickness follow in its train; while death mounted on his pale horse, with the grave and hell follow in the rear. Such are the miseries which sin has introduced into this once happy world; such the evils which attend its progress here, notwithstanding the various restraints which are employed to check its career. Would we see these evils consummated; and learn the full extent of that wretchedness which sin lands to produce, we must follow it into the eternal world, descend into those regions where peace, where hope never comes; and there by the light of revelation behold sin tyrannizing over its wretched victims with uncontrollable fury; fanning the inextinguishable fire, and sharpening the tooth of the immortal worm. See angels and archangels, thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, stripped of all their primeval glory and beauty, bound in eternal chains and burning with rage and malice against that Being; in whose presence they once rejoiced. and whose praises they once sung. See multitudes of the human race in unutterable agonies of

anguish and despair cursing the gift, the giver and prolonger of their existence, and vainly wishing for annihilation to put a period to their miseries. Follow them through the long, long ages of eternity, and see them sinking deeper and deeper in the bottomless abyss of ruin; perpetually blaspheming God because of their plagues, and receiving the punishment of these blasphemies in continual additions to their wretchedness. Such are the wages of sin such the inevitable doom of the finally impenitent. From these depths of anguish and despair, look up to the mansions of the blessed, and see to what a height of glory and felicity the grace of God will raise every sinner that repenteth. See those who are thus favored in unutterable ecstasies of joy, love and praise, contemplating God face to face, reflecting his perfect image, shining with a splendor like that of their glorious Redeemer, filled with all the fullness of Deity, and bathing in those rivers of pleasure which flow forever at God's right hand. Follow them in their endless flight toward perfection. See them rapidly mounting from height to height, and darting onward with increasing swiftness and unwearied wing, toward that infinity which they will never reach. View this, and their say, whether infinite holiness and benevolence may not with propriety rejoice over every sinner that by repentance escapes the miseries and secures the felicity here so imperfectly described.

Why does the Son of God rejoice over every sinner that repenteth? I answer,

1. Why does a mother rejoice over her infant offspring? Is it not because she has given them existence and support? Why does a father rejoice over and press to his heart with new fondness the child, whom he has just rescued from the flames which consumed his habitation? Is it not because he has saved the object of his affections at the peril of his own life? So if it be asked, why Christ rejoices over repenting sinners, we reply, because he has given them spiritual life and nourishment; because he has redeemed them with his own precious blood from eternal wretchedness and despair. In the joy arising from other sources he participates with his Father and the Holy Spirit; but this is a cause of joy almost peculiar to himself. It was long since predicted respecting him, that he should see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; in other words, that he should see the effects of his sufferings in the repentance and salvation of sinners; and consider this as a sufficient recompense for all the toils and sorrows through which he was called to pass. This prediction is daily fulfilling. Our Immanuel sees the fruit of the travail of his soul in every sinner that repenteth, and rejoices that his agonies were not endured in vain. There are, we trust, not a few in this assembly, over whom he has thus rejoiced. And O! with what affectionate emotions must he regard them. You can in some degree conceive, my friends, what your feelings would be toward a trembling dove, that should fly into your bosom for protection from the talons of a vulture. You can form some conception of the feelings with which David contemplated the helpless lamb, which he had rescued at the peril of his own life from the paw of the lion and the jaws of the bear. But who can conceive of the emotions, with which the Son of David must contemplate an immortal soul, drawn to his feet by the cords of love, whom he has rescued from the roaring lion at such an infinite expense? If we love, and prize and rejoice in

any object in proportion to the labor, pain and expense which it has cost us to obtain it, how greatly must Christ love and prize and rejoice in every penitent sinner! His love and joy must be unutterable, inconceivable, infinite. Compared with his, even a mother's love must be cold. My friends, for once I rejoice that our Saviour's toils and sufferings were so great, since the greater they were, the greater must be his love for us and his joy in our conversion. And permit me to add, if he thus rejoices over one sinner that repenteth, what must be his joy, when all his people are collected out of every tongue and kindred and nation and people, and presented spotless before his Father's throne! What a full tide of felicity will pour in upon him, and how will his benevolent heart expand with unutterable delight, and swell almost to bursting, when contemplating the countless myriads of the redeemed, he says, Were it not for my sufferings, all these immortal beings would have been throughout eternity as miserable—and now they will be as happy; as God can make them. It is enough. I see of the travail of my soul and am satisfied. My friends, how great must that joy, that happiness be, which satisfies the benevolence of Christ.

2. The Son of God, with his Father and the Holy Spirit, rejoices when sinners repent, because they then begin to return his love, and acknowledge, with admiring gratitude, the wisdom of his dispensations. You need not be told, that it is the very nature of love to wish for a return of affection. You can easily conceive why a fond mother rejoices when her infant child becomes capable of perceiving and returning her love. You can conceive why her joy increases, when the same child arrives at an age sufficient to see and acknowledge her wisdom and love, even in those corrections, which it once perhaps considered as indicating a want of affection. Should any of you be called to attend, for a series of years, some dear friend under mental derangement; and with unwearied love should spend many wearisome days and sleepless nights in promoting his comfort, and preserving him from self-destruction, while he regarded you as an enemy, considered your presence as irksome, and all your labors and precautions as needless and cruel, would you not rejoice, to see his reason returning; to see his eye once more sparkle with intelligence, and beam with affection; to hear him gratefully acknowledging and extolling your friendship, and to perceive in all his looks and actions that he returned it? And why may we not suppose that our compassionate Redeemer, and even our heavenly Father is capable of being affected in a similar way? They have loved all who repent with an everlasting love, a love stronger than death. But this love is never perceived or returned by the objects of it, while they continue impenitent! On the contrary, they are then enemies to God. and often consider his laws, his dispensations, and even the very means which he employs to bring them to himself, as destructive of their happiness. Similar feelings they exercise toward Christ. They see in him no form or comeliness, and when he comes to bless and save them, they are ready to say, like the man among the tombs, let us alone, what have we to do with thee? But when they repent, the scene is changed. They then come to themselves, and sit at the feet of Jesus in their right mind. The love of God is shed abroad in their hearts. the spirit of adoption is given them, they cry, Abba Father. The law and

character of God appear to them perfectly excellent and lovely. The love of Christ constrains them to live not to themselves, but to him who died for them and rose again; while the genuine language of their hearts is, Whom have we in heaven but thee? and there is none in the earth we desire besides thee. Bless the Lord, O our souls, and all that is within us, bless his holy name; who forgiveth all our iniquities, who healeth all our diseases.

Why do the angels rejoice over every sinner that repenteth? They rejoice,

1. Because God rejoices. It is said respecting David, that whatsoever the king did pleased all the people. So whatever God does, pleases all the angelic hosts. His Spirit is the soul which guides and animates them all; their wills are swallowed up in his; and his interest, glory and happiness, are dearer to them than their own, or rather are considered by them as their own. Hence his feelings govern theirs. Is he displeased? they burn with holy zeal to execute his vengeance. Does he rejoice? they cannot but participate and echo back his joy. Like the servants in the parable, they rejoice with our heavenly Father when his lost children are found, and stand ready to assist in affording them a welcome reception. They rejoice,

2. Because it is their disposition to rejoice in the happiness of others. They literally love others as they do themselves; and since they know by experience the felicity which results from enjoying the favor of God, they cannot but wish that other creatures should possess it. They see in the fate of the fallen angels, the dreadful consequences of God's displeasure. They cannot therefore but wish that others should escape it. And since they know that repentance is the only way in which sinners of the human race can escape God's anger and secure his favor, they cannot but rejoice when any of them repent.

3. They rejoice when sinners repent, because God is glorified and his perfections are displayed in giving them repentance and remission of sins. The perfections of God are to be seen only in his works. His moral perfections are to be seen only, or at least principally, in his works of grace. There is more of God, more of his essential glory displayed in bringing one sinner to repentance, and forgiving his sins for the sake of Christ, than in all the wonders of creation. Agreeably, the psalmist informs us, that when the Lord shall build up Zion, that is, when he shall enlarge his church, the spiritual Zion, by bringing sinners into it, he shall appear in his glory; in other words, shall appear peculiarly glorious! He does so. In this work creatures may see, if I may so express it, the very heart of God. From this work angels themselves have probably learned more of God's moral character, than they had ever been able to learn before. They knew before that God was wise and powerful, for they had seen him create a world. They knew that he was good, for he had made them perfectly holy and happy. They knew that he was just, for they had seen him cast down their own rebellious brethren from heaven to hell for their sins. But until they saw him give repentance and remission of sins through Christ, they did not know that he was merciful, and they did not know

that he could pardon a sinner. And O! what an hour was that in heaven, when this great truth was first made known; when the first penitent was pardoned! Then anew song was put into the mouths of angels, and while with unutterable emotions of wonder, love and praise, they began to sing it; their voices swelled to a higher pitch, and they experienced joys unfelt before. O how did the joyful sounds, his mercy endureth for ever, spread from choir to choir, echo through the high arches of heaven, and thrill through every enraptured angelic breast; and how did they cry with one voice, Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace and good will to man.

Nor is the mercy of God the only perfection displayed in this work. There is more power and wisdom displayed in bringing a sinner to repentance, than in creating a world; and therefore as the sons of God sang together and shouted for joy, when God laid the foundations of the earth, so with still greater reason do they rejoice at beholding the wonders of the new creation in the souls of men. They delight to watch the beginnings of spiritual life in those who had long been dead in sin; to see light and order breaking in upon the natural darkness and confusion of the mind; to see the image of Satan disappearing and to trace the first lineaments of the image of God in the soul. With inexpressible satisfaction do they see the heart of stone transformed to flesh, notice the first penitential tears which flow from the sinner's eyes, and listen to the imperfectly formed petitions, the infant cries of the young child of grace. With the utmost readiness do they descend from their blissful abode to minister to the new-born heir of salvation, and surround him in joyful throngs, celebrating his birthday with songs of praise. Behold, they cry, another trophy of sovereign, all-conquering grace. Behold another captive delivered by the Son of David, from the bondage of sin, another lamb of his flock rescued from paw of the lion and the jaws of the bear. See the principalities and powers of darkness foiled; see the strong man armed cast out; see the kingdom of Jesus extending, see the image of our God multiplied, see another voice tuned to join in the hallelujahs of the heavenly choirs. This, O our Creator, is thy work. Glory to God in the highest. This, O adorable Immanuel, is the effect of thy sufferings. Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessing and honor and power be unto him that sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb forever.

INFERENCES

From this subject we infer,

1. The incalculable worth of the human soul. To say that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, is to say all that can be said or imagined on this subject. Our Saviour himself, who spoke as never man spake, could say nothing more expressive of the worth of the soul than this; for in heaven the real value of this immortal spark of intelligence is known; and were it not a jewel of inestimable worth, never would its loss have grieved God at the heart; never would he have given his only Son to redeem it; never would he rejoice, and call on all the

heavenly hosts to rejoice with him on its recovery. It can surely be no trifle which excites so deep an interest in the hearts of celestial beings. It can be no trifle, the acquisition of which increases the already ineffable joys of heaven. Yet such is the wretched infatuation of mankind, that they almost universally neglect this precious jewel, and barter it for bubbles, vanities and dreams, though a thousand worlds so bought, were bought too dear.

2. From this subject we infer, that the consequences of dying in an impenitent state will be unspeakably dreadful. You cannot but be sensible, my friends, that the inhabitants of heaven knew perfectly well, what these consequences will be; and did they not know them to be dreadful, unspeakably dreadful, would they thus rejoice over every sinner, who escapes them by repentance? If no punishment awaits impenitent sinners in a future state, or if their punishment be short in duration, or trifling in degree; would celestial beings thus rejoice to see sinners repent? When you see a mother transported with joy at the recovery of a sick child, do you not infer, that she considered the disease as very dangerous? So when we see the inhabitants of heaven rejoicing with new joys over a penitent sinner, must we not infer that they consider the punishment from which he has escaped as inconceivably dreadful?

3. From this subject we infer, that all who repent will certainly persevere and be saved. Suppose; for one moment, that such may fall and perish? Would God, would Christ, would angels then rejoice to see sinners repent? To see them placed in a situation where they had nothing to support them, but their own faithfulness to grace received? Would they rejoice to see penitent sinners in a situation from which perfect Adam fell, and which holy angels failed to keep? No, they would rather weep to see a weak, frail creature placed in a situation from which he would immediately fall, fall into a state if possible, more helpless than that from which Sovereign grace had raised him.

4. What an astonishing view does this subject give us of the benevolence of angels. Though they are perfectly happy, and though our character and conduct must, to them appear inconceivably hateful, yet they forget themselves to think of us; they forget their own happiness to rejoice in ours. That we may more fully conceive of their benevolence, it is necessary to recollect, that they have the strongest possible temptations to envy us; and this they would do, did they in the smallest degree resemble mankind; for God passed by their fallen brethren, and provided no Saviour for them. Christ took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham; and now they see us sinful worms of the dust, through Sovereign grace, not only plucked as brands from the fires, in which their fallen brethren are consumed, but even exalted above themselves in glory and felicity, being made the children of God, while they are only his servants. Yet instead of envying us on this account, or murmuring at God's distinguishing grace, they rejoice in our happiness. Yes, let us hear, and be confounded and hide our faces with shame in the dust; these benevolent beings rejoice to see sinful creatures of an inferior order exalted above themselves. Nay more, they

cheerfully condescend to be our servants, even while we are clothed in sinful flesh; and to minister to us as heirs of salvation. This is the charity which seeketh not her own. This is to love one's neighbor as one's self, this is indeed the temper of the Son of God. My friends, are you not certain, that we naturally know nothing of such a temper? Are you not sensible, that such creatures as we are by nature, must be created anew, before we can imitate these benevolent beings? Are you not convinced that if this be the of heaven, we must all be born again before we can see the kingdom of God?

5. From this subject we may learn whether we are prepared for heaven. We presume none will deny that preparation for heaven implies something of a heavenly temper. If then, we are thus prepared we have something of such a temper. Like the angels, we are pleased with God's sovereignty, and rejoice when sinners repent. We desire and pray that the kingdom of God may come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We are willing to do and suffer much to promote the salvation of sinners; and we are willing that others should do and suffer more, so as to outshine and eclipse ourselves. If this be our temper, we need no angel to come from heaven and tell us that our names are written in the Lamb's book of life. There has already been joy over us in heaven as penitent sinners, and ere many years have elapsed, there will be fresh joy over us on our arrival there. But if we know nothing of this temper, if we are dissatisfied with the sovereign, distinguishing grace of God, if it gives us no pleasure, to hear of the effusions of the divine Spirit, to see sinners repenting and flocking to Christ; if like the proud elder brother, we feel envious when we behold penitent prodigals rejoicing in the truth; or like the Pharisees, are displeased to hear new-born souls crying, Hosannas to the Son of David; or if we are unwilling to spend and be spent in promoting the spread of the gospel, and the salvation of sinners—it is certain that we in no respect resemble the angels of God; we cannot share in their joys, or join in their songs; and unless our hearts should be renovated by divine grace, we shall never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Once more. Do the inhabitants of heaven rejoice when sinners repent? Then they rejoice in all the means which are employed to bring sinners to repentance. If this be the case, with what joyful emotions must they contemplate the prospect, which our world begins to present to their view. In this fallen, ruined world, once sunk in ignorance and wickedness, where Satan reigned with almost unlimited sway, they now see many societies formed, and a variety of means employed to diffuse the knowledge of Christ and reconcile men to God. The sound of the everlasting gospel has gone out into all the earth. The Scriptures of truth are flying, as it were, on an angel's wing throughout the world; and soon, we trust, will every nation, and kindred, and people hear them speaking to them in their own tongue, and declaring the wonderful works of God. Already from the farthest parts of the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the righteous. These songs have also been heard in heaven, and have there doubtless called forth new songs of praise to him, who is wise in counsel and wonderful in working, the real author of everything amiable or excellent both in heaven and on earth. Over

every institution for the spread of the gospel, which he has prompted his creatures to form, there has, we doubt not, been joy in heaven. Comparatively feeble as are the means, and circumscribed as are the operations of this Missionary Society, we doubt not that angels rejoiced in its formation. We doubt not that they are now looking down with mingled emotions of wonder, thankfulness, and love, to see those who are by nature children of wrath, enemies to God, and entirely destitute of concern for his glory or for the happiness of his creatures, engaged in devising means to bring their perishing fellow sinners to repentance. We are certain that every sinner who has been brought to repentance by the exertions of this Society, has occasioned joy in heaven, joy to God, to his Son, to his Spirit, and to angels. My fathers and brethren, what an encouraging thought is this? How should it animate us to reflect, that our feeble exertions produce joy in heaven; that heaven from which all our present blessings come, and in which all our future happiness is to be enjoyed. What more noble, or more glorious motive of action can we have in view, than to glorify God, produce joy in heaven, and rescue sinners from hell. Had we been made instrumental in doing this once only; had only one sinner been brought to repentance in consequence of the exertions of this Society, it would have been a rich, and abundant reward for all that has been done. But through divine grace we have reason to hope, that there has been not only one, but many. Let us then, bless God and take courage, remembering that he who converts a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death and hide a multitude of sins.

In view of these truths, my hearers, it surely cannot be necessary to solicit your assistance in carrying into effect the objects of this society. We do not solicit it. We will not ask you to bestow favors on Christ; but we tell you that Christ is ready to bestow a favor on you. The rightful possessor and proprietor of heaven and earth; he, who though he was rich, for your sakes became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich, condescends to accept of your assistance to do that, which he could with infinite ease accomplish without it. He condescends to accept as a gift, a small portion of his own bounty, when he might justly demand the whole as a debt; and if a poor subject would consider it as a favor for his sovereign to accept some worthless gift at his hand, and reward him for it a thousand fold, how thankful should we be, that the King of kings, condescends to accept and reward our sinful services; and how joyfully should we seize every opportunity that is offered us of doing or suffering any thing for the sake of Christ.

But let us never forget, that if we would have our services acceptable, our hearts must go with them. Like the Macedonian Christians, we must first give our own selves to the Lord, presenting our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service. My friends, are there any of us who have neglected to do this? any over whom the inhabitants of heaven have never rejoiced? If so; it becomes us to repent without delay. To the immediate performance of this duty, my impenitent hearers, you are urged by every motive which is calculated to influence rational beings. You are urged to it by the plain,

positive command of Jehovah. God now commandeth all men every where to repent. We lay this command across your path. You cannot proceed one step farther in a sinful course, without treading it under foot. You are urged to it by a regard to your own interest; for except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. You are urged to it by all the blessed angels, who are waiting with desire to rejoice in your conversion. Above all, you are most powerfully urged to it by the blessed Redeemer, whom you are under the strongest possible obligations to love and obey. He has done and suffered much for you. For you he has tasted death. For you, he cheerfully endured the scoffs and cruelties of men; the rage and malice of devils; and the overwhelming weight of his Father's wrath. In return for all this, he requests of you one small favor. He merely requests you to repent and be happy. If you comply with this request, he will see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. He will consider the joy resulting from your repentance, as a sufficient recompense for all that he has done and suffered in your behalf. O then, be persuaded, my friends, to comply with this request. Be persuaded to give joy to God, to his Son, and to the blessed angels, to make this day a festival in heaven by repenting. Even now your heavenly Father is waiting for your return, and the Redeemer stands ready with expanded arms to receive you. Even now the white robes and the ring are provided, and the fatted calf is made ready to feast returning prodigals. Even now angels and archangels are ready to pour forth their most joyful songs to celebrate your return. And will you then, by persisting in your impenitence, seal up their lips? Will you render all this preparation in vain; and slight the raiment and the banquet which God has provided? Will you go away impenitent, and thus practically say, there shall be no joy in heaven this day on our account. God shall not be glorified, Christ shall not be gratified, angels shall not rejoice if we can prevent it? If there be any present, of whose feelings and conduct this is the language, we solemnly but reluctantly declare unto you, in the name of Jehovah, that God and his Son shall be glorified, and there shall be joy over you in heaven, notwithstanding all your endeavors to prevent it. Never shall any of his creatures rob God of his glory; and if you will not consent that his grace shall be glorified in your salvation, he will be compelled to glorify his justice in your everlasting destruction. If you will not allow the inhabitants of heaven to rejoice in your repentance, their love of justice, truth and holiness, will constrain them to rejoice in your condemnation, and to sing alleluia, while the smoke of your torment ascendeth up forever and ever. Hear then, ye immortal spirits, ye probationers for eternity, ye heirs of heaven or hell, hear and obey, before it is too late, the warning, inviting voice which calls you to repent.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*. If you would like to discuss this article in our online community, please visit our [Reformed Perspectives Magazine Forum](#).

Subscribe to Reformed Perspectives Magazine

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [Reformed Perspectives Magazine](#), please select this [link](#).