



## The Burning Bush—Online article archive

### “The wisdom of changing your mind”



*The synopsis of a sermon preached by Rev. Ivan Foster in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church on Lord's Day evening, November 16th, 2003.*

“He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went,” Matthew 21:29.

As this land of ours faces another election, it stands before an open door of opportunity which it does not deserve. Ulster has decided foolishly and recklessly in the past, when faced with the choice of accepting or rejecting the “Good Friday Agreement.” This time, with even greater evidence before our eyes of the deceitfulness of this Agreement and all those who devised and promote it, Ulster must change her mind and reject it. For such a change of mind, every believer should be much exercised in prayer as election day, November 26th, approaches. It would be a wonderful token of God’s mercy toward us if such prayers were answered. Our text is all about the changing of the mind on that most vital of all matters — the challenge of the gospel. The Saviour is here showing the Jews that there are only two kinds of hearers: those who outrightly reject the gospel and then change their minds and those who reject the gospel but give the appearance of accepting it. I would have you amongst the first kind.

#### **I. MAN INSTINCTIVELY REJECTS THE MESSAGE OF GOD.**

Both kinds of listeners reject the commands of God, one openly, the other deceitfully. We are considering the first kind.

**1. Note the rudeness of the response.** This son had little respect for his father when he responded in such a brusque manner. It truly illustrates man’s attitude toward God. Sinners are most disrespectful to God. They defy Him and denigrate His person and authority. The manner of man’s treatment of Christ was demonstrated from the very beginning of His ministry. The reaction of the congregation in the synagogue in Nazareth to the Christ’s announcing of His Messiahship was murderous indeed. “And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went his way,” Luke 4:28-30. That is loutish behaviour indeed!

**2. The bluntness of the response.** There is an immediate reply. No consideration is given. The truth is spat out before it is even tasted! God would have men consider His Word. “O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!” Deuteronomy 32:29. But there is no consideration given. The truth is instantly rejected.

**3. The boldness of the reply.** There is a defying of God and that openly.

**4. The rebelliousness of this response.** Man is a rebel against God by nature. There is



## The Burning Bush—Online article archive

nothing that God will suggest or command that is acceptable to man. His mind is in a constant state of insurrection. "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be," Romans 8: 7. Judas would rather put a rope around his neck than wear the yoke of Christ! So it is with every man.

**5. The unreasonableness of this reply.** Why not labour in his father's vineyard? Is it not to his own advantage? It will be his vineyard one day. Sinners have other works that are more to their liking. They have no time therefore for doing the will of God. "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it," John 8: 44. The heart of man is inclined toward those activities that spring from the evil nature that lies within him. "And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused," Luke 14: 18. This is a familiar verse and it illustrates the "other things" the sinner will ever put before the issues of eternity and obeying the call of God.

### II. THE MIND OF MAN WILL BE CHANGED ONLY BY THE GRACE OF GOD

"But afterward he repented." This "afterwards" repentance illustrates the work of grace which God must work in the heart of the sinner before he can change his mind. The Shorter Catechism, question 87 asks: "What is repentance unto life?" The answer given is succinct and precise. "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience." This statement sets forth the basic elements of true repentance.

**1. A sense of sin is granted.** This is what David was given as is clear from his words in Psalm 51: 4. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." David saw sin as God saw it and that is the only true view of sin to have.

**2. The mercy of God is understood.** Again, the sinner by nature is blind to the goodness and mercy of God but grace opens his eyes. "And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil," Joel 2: 13. A sight of God's mercy presented to us in Christ melts the heart and bends the knee.

**3. True grief is manifested.** That is what the repentant thief on the cross displayed. "But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss," Luke 23: 40-41. True repentance involves a manifestation of grief over our sin. "Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations," Ezekiel 36: 31.

**4. A turning from disobedience is displayed.** Defiance of God comes to an end. "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin," Ezekiel 18: 30. "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me,



## The Burning Bush—Online article archive

and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God," Jeremiah 31:18.

**5. The face of God is sought for pardon.** "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD," Lamentations 3:40. Do you recall the picture of the sinner who went up to the temple to pray and returned home pardoned? "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican . . . And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other," Luke 18:10-14. This is the repentance which the Lord, by His grace, works in the sinner's heart.

### III. THE MARK OF A TRUE CHANGING OF THE MIND IS SEEN IN A DOING OF THE WILL OF GOD

He went and worked in his father's vineyard. Just what is this "work" in which sinners must engage? "Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent," John 6:29. It is not the work of self-redemption but that of an abandoning of ourselves to Christ. It is the "work" to which Paul and Silas called the jailer at Philippi. "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house," Acts 16:31. It is the work of casting away all hope in ourselves or trust in our works to appease God and a casting of ourselves upon Christ.

It is that work of recognising ourselves to be helpless, blind, condemned, lost and undone and our fleeing to Christ for shelter and salvation. It is the work in which Noah and his family engaged when they sought refuge in the ark. It is the work in which Peter engaged when he called upon the Lord to save him as he sank beneath the waves. "But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me," Matthew 14:30.

### IV. UTTER RUIN IS THE OUTCOME OF A FAILURE TO TURN

There must be a giving of an account by sinful men for the dishonour that they have inflicted upon the name and person of the Lord. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?" Mal 1:6. Men will be called to account for this dishonouring and despising of God.

Oh! how much men reject their own interests when they reject the gospel. Obedience to the gospel call is the most reasonable thing that sinful men will ever undertake. No work will ever reward the labourer as does this work. What folly then will follow the disobeying of the gospel. You turn from heaven and the precious heritage of the saints when you act so. Forsake not your own mercy! Turn not away from the only means of salvation! Continue not on saying 'NO!' but turn in repentance and say 'Yes' to Christ.

*O turn while the Saviour in mercy is waiting, And steer for the harbour light; For how do you know but your soul may be drifting Over the dead-line tonight?*