

"CHANGE YOUR MINDS."

MATT. 3:2.

(See Young's Concordance under word repent.)

Stability of character and purpose are qualities which we all admire. We like the man upon whom we can depend. To know that a man is what is commonly termed fickle, is to make us distrustful; for the course which he will pursue to-day, is not an index of what he will be or do tomorrow. With such a man we cannot do business with pleasure, and so will have no more to do with him than we are obliged to. Of such a man it is said, "He has no mind of his own," he has no settled character; he is driven hither and thither by circumstances, so takes no root and withers away. Such a man has not much influence, because people do not know where to find him, nor what to expect of him.

Again, the man who never changes is a hard man to deal with; you know where to find him always, to be sure; he is fixed; he has a purpose of his own, and if it is not like yours, the reason, in his mind, is, that yours is good for nothing. You need not undertake to move him, he is settled, he is established, he has become fossilized. The world moves on and leaves him behind. You may go to the spot where you left him, though it be a decade after, and there you will find him glorying in his unchangeable nature. "He is wise in his own conceit." Not willing to "receive instruction," he is not bothered with having to change his mind; such a man will have to learn by some other mode than precept. Let us be glad that our Heavenly Father has provided more than one mode of instruction.

Now, both these characters are wrong, they are extremes, and it is hard to tell which is the most to be shunned; perhaps the latter, for he may be always wrong, while the former will be right at least part

of the time; but a not over sanguine temperament would better comport with limited knowledge, and a sufficient [R358 : page 2] amount of firmness would meet and repel evil assault.

Change of mind is a necessary operation with all finite creatures, so far as we know, because their knowledge is imperfect. An important part of man's work in this world should be, at proper times, to change his mind. Show us a man who never changes his mind, and we will show you a man who never makes any additions to his knowledge, or else is a bigot, which is usually about the same.

There is but one character in the universe who never changes his mind, i.e., the Almighty, Allwise, and Eternal God. Because his knowledge is perfect he need not change his mind, or perhaps more properly, he need not change. "But," says some one, "the Bible says he repented because he had made man. How is that?" Though that is a little irrelevant, we will stop a moment to consider it, as it is often brought up by skeptics. How could God's change of conduct toward man be expressed to him, in the childhood of the race, in other and better language? Some have said in explanation that it meant that he changed his purpose; but this answer was not satisfactory for the reason that it did not change the meaning, but only the word.

Let us use an illustration; our Heavenly Father provides them in abundance. Suppose that a little boy having no knowledge of horticulture should see his father planting apple-seeds, and after awhile should see him trans-planting the young trees; he might inquire, Father, what made you plant your apple-seeds there? Why didn't you plant them where you wanted them to remain? The father might reply, I did want them there then, but now I do not; I have changed my mind; now I want them to stand where they will have more room, etc. It would be difficult to explain to the child-mind the broad plan of the father, but he can be made to see clearly that there has been a change. In this illustration the father changed one part of

his plan as it related to another part of the same plan, i.e., there was, to one not understanding his plan, an apparent change of purpose, and one, too, not in harmony with the original design, and yet it was all in the mind and design of the father from the first. So with our Heavenly Father. He communicates with us according to our understanding, and if our hearts were right, we should not so readily misunderstand him. He speaks of things as they seem to us, and not always as they really are, and we do the same, and think it all right enough when we do it. He speaks to us of the sun's rising and setting, and we do too, whereas we know that it is only apparent; let us reason the same with this word repent, and we shall have no further trouble. So we increase in knowledge and grace, we shall understand him better, and in just the proportion that we grow in knowledge, we change our minds, or "repent"; at least that is what we should do. By this we do not wish to be understood as saying that we should ignore all that we have passed over, or that a change of mind involves a condemnation of all our former opinions, but that our minds should change something as the trees change from small to large, from a few to many branches, and from blossom to fruit; and in doing this we gradually put away the former things; for the tree had to pass through its sappling condition, before it could extend its far-reaching branches. So we pass through the transitions of mind and character.

There are special seasons when important changes should take place both in the physical and moral world. This time in which John was speaking was one of those seasons. The fullness of time had come and God had sent his Son into the world to realize to the world the signification of the "types and shadows" of the Jewish ceremonial. For many centuries these shadows had been indicating "good things to come"; but now they were to be lost in the glory of the brighter and better day.

He whom they pointed to was present. The passover lamb was to be superseded by the lamb of God, of whom the former was but the figure.

At the time John made the proclamation above referred to, the Jewish church were more strict to observe every particular of the ceremonial law than perhaps at any time in their history; they were scrupulous to pay tithe of mint and anise, plants like or identical with our dill and caraway; when we consider that their tithe was a tenth part, we can see how nice they were to observe the letter of the law where it did not so directly affect the heart and life. They could be strictly scrupulous in regard to the slightest ritual performances, while having but little remorse for the grossest immoralities. It is not at all likely that they understood the deep spiritual import of most of the forms that Paul calls "shadows of good things to come." At this juncture John makes his appearance and exhorts them to "repent (change their minds; see Young's Concordance, and Emphatic Diaglott, reform) because the royal majesty of the heavens has approached." In these forms, or in the observance of them, they thought they had eternal life; (John 5:39) but now he who was to bring light and immortality to light had come; now John had given them more definite instruction upon these weighty matters, and with increase of knowledge there should be a corresponding change of mind, so he makes the announcement in accordance with the facts.

We think the nominal Christian church of to-day occupies, in many respects, a similar position; each different section or sect being very strict to observe the letter of their law, and thinking that in them they have eternal life; but that law, or those laws, instead of being God's requirements, are the formulated laws of the leaders of the various societies, supposed to be based upon God's law or word; they have built upon this foundation, but with hay, wood, and stubble. (1 Cor. 3:12.)

Now some seem to think when you speak to them about this matter, that it is of no particular consequence if they are only upon the right foundation. Jesus showed that it was important to be founded upon a rock (Matt. 7:24,25), and Paul shows that it is important also to build with good material. Some seem to think that if they are only saved, that is enough, but would not reason so about their earthly matters; though they might think it fortunate to escape from their burning house, yet they would think it better to have a house that would not have taken fire; thus showing that "the children of this world are wiser in their GENERATION." If a member of any one of these societies should be arraigned for misdemeanor, the law of that society ("Discipline," "Regulations," or whatever) is the standard by which the misdemeanor is measured and weighed.

During the time of the church's wanderings, through the dark ages, while walking in adulterous union with the world, the light that was in it "became darkness," and how great was that darkness. Man came to use the word of God as a medium of worldly gain, and when once begun, there seemed to be no limit to which the enemy would lead in distorting the truth, for the truth had to be the means of giving acceptability to the counterfeit. So now the nominal Christian church is in a condition strikingly similar to that of the Jewish church then, i.e., "rich and increased in goods, and having need of nothing," according to their opinion, but as the Lord sees, "poor and blind and naked," and their doing similar to that described in Mal. 1:13.

So the proclamation of John comes with equal if not greater force": "change your minds," "reform because the royal majesty of the heavens has approached."

But, says some one, what has our church to repent of? Do we not teach that men must repent of their sins to be saved? Yes, but what idea do you give them of salvation, and of their friends who do not obtain the salvation which they are told about? Is not the salvation

which you tell them of, embraced in the idea of songs of praise to God, and word-worship and glorification of his wondrous majesty, and possibly some idea of learning more of his glorious attributes? All this is included in the "great salvation," but it is a meagre representation of it from the Bible standpoint as we (we say it humbly) view it. Then those who do not attain to this salvation, it is said, God will miserably torment without end of duration.

Now we cry aloud that the effulgent glory shed abroad by the approach of "the royal majesty of the heavens," throws such light upon his word, that we repent, and call upon all who hold such ideas of God and salvation to "change their minds" and actions accordingly.

J. C. SUNDERLIN.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]