

Reconciling with One Another: Repentance, Part 1

Selected Scriptures

In cases of repeated offenses, where you need to keep on forgiving that person who keeps coming back to you, having committed the same sin. They're starting to reach their seventy-times-seven limit, right? Over and over and over, is it reasonable to expect that person to deal with his issues and to stop sinning? Or do you need to simply keep on enduring the offenses, keep on forgiving, keep on turning the other cheek, and when you run out of cheeks, offer some other body part to him? Another way to ask the question is, does reconciliation involve any expectation of future accountability? Let me give you the simple, bottom-line answer, Yes. Seeking forgiveness, granting forgiveness, there is an expectation of accountability. There is an expectation of change. It is reasonable to expect Christians to change; that is, after all, what the Gospel tells us it will do to us. It changes us from enemies to friends. It changes us from aliens and strangers to now adopted children in God's family. There's the first change, and after that change, this change of a new nature. There's the old nature that is dead

and gone, and there's a new nature in us, and that new nature does not act the same as it did before. Yes, Christians change. And so it is reasonable to expect Christians to change, to stop sinning and to walk in righteousness.

What about non-Christians? Different kettle of fish, isn't it? We expect non-Christians are going to continue in their sin. They are going to keep on offending us because they're unregenerate, and they are still enslaved to an old nature, and that's why, whenever you find people who profess Christ but they continue in those same old sins, never really making any reasonable change, there is good reason to question that person's profession of faith. And perhaps your love should take a different approach to that person, and you need to start evangelizing them instead of expecting them to walk in a righteousness that they have never been introduced to. That's very frustrating for the person on the other end of that. When they have no mechanism inside of them to change because they're not Christians. They've grown up in a weak evangelicalism that has given them a false gospel and a false assurance of their faith, and they profess to be Christians, but they're never changing. They're never growing; they're never loving Christ more. They're never displaying any of the fruits of the Spirit. And you keep on harping on them because they're not. Well, maybe

what you ought to do is take a different approach and say, you know what? Maybe it's the fact that this is another one of those that the Bible calls a false professor, a false convert, and maybe I need to see them in that category and love them instead by evangelizing them.

But for Christians, it is absolutely reasonable to expect Christians to repent of their sin and to walk righteously before God. And it is not judgmental to confront sin, folks. It's loving. It's kind. Why? Because no true Christian wants to keep on sinning. Every single one of us who are saved, we hate our sin, don't we? And the more we understand about the cross of Jesus Christ and what it cost God to forgive us, the more it makes us abhor ourselves that we would ever commit any sin that would put him on the cross. And so, folks, we're thankful to one another, aren't we, when we point out each other's sin and help each other repent? No true Christian wants to keep sinning. The mark of a regenerate person is a desire to repent and to change and to walk in righteousness, right?

The crowning action of reconciling relationships is in this issue of repentance. This, here, this repentance, is the proof of our express desire to be reconciled with somebody else. Those who truly want to reconcile, they not only want to confess their

sins and ask for forgiveness and grant forgiveness to one another, but most importantly, they want to stop sinning against each other, don't they? That is the joy of living in repentance, that we get to put off sin and put on righteousness.

Repentance is really the essence of the Christian life. As Christians in pursuit of personal holiness, repentance is and should be a regular, normal characteristic pattern of our daily lives. We sin, and we don't want to sin. We offend God and others, and we don't want to do that. So we're constantly occupied with this issue of repentance. We're renewing our minds through God's Word. We're putting off old behaviors. We're putting on new ones. And I just want in this point, this outline point, to read a few Scriptures to set a foundation for the rest of our study and I'd invite you to turn to each one of these passages just so you can read them for yourselves.

Let's start with Romans chapter 12 verses 1 and 2. Romans 12:1-2. Paul has just spent eleven chapters unpacking for the Roman Christians this Gospel that he has been preaching throughout the span of his apostolic ministry. Paul is seeking their support as he extends his missionary outreach into Spain, and so he wants them to know this Gospel that he's preaching. So after eleven chapters of Gospel, he talks then, about the

implications of the Gospel on their day-to-day lives. Look at Romans 12:1-2, "I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God." What are those? Eleven chapters of reading will help you understand those, okay? "I appeal to you, brothers, therefore, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual," or reasonable, or logical, "worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

In its essence, verse 2 right there, is a description of repentance. You should think of repentance really in directional terms; that is, you're repenting *from* something, you're leaving something behind and you're repenting *to* something. You leave something behind: a behavior, a way of, of thinking, a pattern of speech, or whatever, and you're pursuing an altogether different pattern, different way of thinking. Or to put the matter plainly, you're turning away from sin and pursuing holiness. In this case, Romans 12:1-2, you're turning away from conformity to this world. You're pursuing mind renewal. You're pursuing maturity in the practical discernment of the will of God. This is an entirely different lifestyle that Paul is after, here. It's based on the new orientation you've been given as a

Christian. You understand that your life is no longer your own. It's now, verse 1, "a living sacrifice." What is a sacrifice? It's something fundamentally you let go of, right? Sacrifice it, your time, your, your life, your resources, even your thought life. All of it belongs to God; it does not belong to you. Let's be clear: Living that out is the continual battle of the Christian life, right?

Most of us don't really realize how much we are conformed to this world. We're born into this world, we grow up; just like a fish swimming in water doesn't know it's wet, we grow up in this world not knowing how infused we are and surrounded we are in drinking in, breathing in, breathing out, a sinful way of thinking. We fail to think deeply enough about the Scripture, which means we don't recognize how desperately we need this mind-renewal and this life-transformation. We're too easily satisfied, too easy and quick to excuse ourselves for spiritual laziness and sloth. We need to repent continually, pursue what Paul described as "the obedience of the Gentiles" in his Gospel.

It should be obvious how that affects our relationships with one another, right? So much of our sin springs from worldly thinking applied to relationships. You just keep on thinking in a worldly way, and you're going to do worldly things with one

another, and it's going to hurt people. That is what sin is. But if we're transformed by the renewing of our minds, the life of Christ shining through our transformed character is going to become such a source of joy and blessing to one another.

Let's look at another passage. Turn in your Bibles to the right, to the book of Ephesians, the book of Ephesians, chapter 4, and you can land on verse 17. This passage here, verses 17-19, it describes this continual fight that every Christian has, no matter how long you've been in Christ, this is the heart of the battle, the face of the battle. Ephesians 4:17-19, Paul says, "Now I say this and testify in the Lord that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.

They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their heart. They've become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity." That right there, when he says, no longer walk that way, that's the putting off part of repentance. It has to do with the fallen nature, the fallen mentality. That right there describes the world we live in, right?

That's the mentality, though, that all of us were saved from. Even if you were saved at five years old, you were saved

from that mentality. Before you turned five, you were “darkened in your understanding, alienated from the life of God.” A cute little four-year-old, but you were that right there. You just didn’t have enough life to express yourself. Some of us had time to express ourselves in that way, and it’s become a source of shame to us as we remember those days. This is what we need to be saved from. We need to abandon that as a lifestyle.

A number of you have been Christians for a long time, decades in fact. But listen, if you’re not constantly and diligently in pursuit of repentance and mind-renewal and life-transformation, even you will fall back into this worldly way of thinking. And that’s why Paul commands us, Don’t do that! He’s warning you that you can fall backward. If you’re not pursuing a lifestyle of repentance, your mind can become clouded by futile thinking, shrouded in darkness and ignorance. You can become hard-hearted and calloused, even sensual and impure if it goes on long enough.

So Paul has written this as a warning. He’s commanding Christians in verse 17, that they must no longer walk that way. They must no longer live that way. Instead, they’re to work out repentance. Look at verses 25-32. They’re to cast aside old behaviors and adopt an entirely way of living. It’s the

regenerate lifestyle of truth-telling in verse 25, of keeping short accounts and keeping your anger from turning into sinful anger, verses 26-27. It's, it's hard work in generosity, verse 28. It's edifying speech in verse 29. It's the outworking of lovingkindness, forgiveness, and tenderheartedness in verses 30-32. That right there is the lifestyle of a Christian. All that is based on a change that's taken place inside of us.

Look at verses 20-24. Paul says, "That's not the way you learned Christ." He's pointing back to the Gentile way. "That's not the way you learned Christ, assuming that you have heard about him, were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life, and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds. You are to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

Here's the argument: Since you have put off the old self, that's what happened at salvation, the old nature killed, sacrificed, crucified on the cross with Christ. You have put on the old self, and you are being spiritually renewed, present tense, and you have put on the new self, that is, you're a new nature now, you're to have a new orientation. And your new

orientation is one of utter hostility against the old self, aggressive antipathy toward your old nature, toward old habits, toward old thinking. On the other hand, you're to embrace this zealous pursuit toward Christ-likeness.

You want to see the reality of the new creation, which it says there in verse 24, "is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." You want to see that new creation reality exposed. You want it to be seen with increasing regularity, with increasing frequency, with increasing intensity. Why? Because you want to see God glorified. It's not about you. It's about him being known and seen in the way you live your life. You're not satisfied with mediocrity. You're not satisfied with merely a form of religion. You want to see God's power on display. You want to see his glory revealed in your life because you love him. He's the author, the finisher of your salvation. He's the kind and generous benefactor who's granted you everything in Christ. So you want to see others come to know and love him, too. You realize that starts with you. That starts with the way you live your life, which is based on how you think, which is fundamentally a matter of outworking of personal repentance.

Go to Colossians, chapter 3, Colossians 3:5. Paul begins that amazing chapter, verses 1-4, calling for Christians to “set their minds on things above,” where Christ is, where their life is now hidden in Christ. Our minds need to be so heavenly-minded, we can be, so we can be of some earthly good, right? Here’s the way that happens, starting in verse 5. “Put to death.” That’s really harsh language; yes it is! “Put to death,” kill, mortify, slaughter, destroy, “therefore, what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these, you too once walked when you were living in them, but now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another seeing that you have put,” on the old self with its, or, “off the old self with its practices, and put on the new self, which is being renewed in the knowledge after the image of its creator.” Sounds very much like Ephesians 4, doesn’t it?

Paul begins with a negative side. He tells us what we’re to repent of, what we’re to leave behind. Romans 12: It’s conformity to the world. Ephesians 4: It’s the Gentile walk. Here in Colossians, it’s mortify, it’s put to death all your sins. And when you’re committed to killing those sins in your

life, there is going to be a noticeably positive effect on your relationships. Why? Because it's those heart sins that are the source of all of our broken relationships. James 4:1-2 says, "What causes quarrels and fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel." Listen, if you'll take the time, I'll bet you can boil down every argument in your life down to sins like this and see them in your own heart. This is the source of quarrels and fights among you. That's why Paul says, Colossians 3:5-10, Mortify them, kill them.

Instead, put on Christ-likeness. Look at chapter 3 verses 12 through 15. "Put on, then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgiving each other. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body and be thankful." The pattern of Christian living represented in those verses, that's achieved through a progressive lifestyle of personal repentance. It's a daily habit of putting off the sins of verses 5-10 and putting on the

virtues of verses 12-15. From the very moment of salvation, we're on a path of repentance, which puts on us a trajectory of increasing conformity to those virtues which is Christ-likeness.

Now I took the time to read through those different passages not because I know you don't know them, but because you do know them and because I want to remind you that this series on relationships, it is not isolated from this over-arching responsibility that we have as Christians to grow in Christ. This is how we grow in Christ. It's manifest in the relationships we have with one another. We're not merely trying to fix broken relationships. That is way too low of a goal. Rather, we're trying to walk righteously before God. That's the issue. Pleasing the Lord, that is the heart issue. And when we pursue that goal, we're going to be rightly related to God, and then the fruit of pleasing the Lord and being rightly related to God is healthy, growing, maturing relationships with other people as well. There's real change, here. There's real power. It doesn't leave us unaffected. We're not the same as we've always been. We are altered as Christians.

We're different in a good way. And the fruit of this lifestyle of repentance, it ought to be seen happening in all of our relationships. Husbands, you should be growing in your role

as a husband, so your wife isn't dealing with the same kind of man you have been since the very beginning of your marriage. Sins you brought into the marriage, the sins you had at your wedding should be decreasing in frequency and intensity. If they're going in the other direction, that's a problem. You ought to be increasing in your leadership, increasing in your teaching, increasing in your understanding of God's Word so that you explain that to your wife and to your kids and to everybody around you. You're a man, after all, and God has designed you and chosen you to be a leader and a teacher in whatever realm he's given you to exercise those gifts. Wives, same thing for you. The fruit of your spiritual growth should be noticeable to your husband and to your children. The intimacy of all those relationships in the home means those at home are going to be able to see your growth or lack of growth. They're going to be able to see that more clearly than anybody else because it's an intimate setting.

Same thing with relationships within the church among the body of Christ. Year after year, we should be growing in our relationships with one another. And as we look back over the years, there should be marked growth, noticeable change. I realize from one week to the next you feel like it's like one step forward, two steps back, and you've blown it yet again. But

I'll tell you, if you look back over five years, over ten years, there ought to be a change in your trajectory. There should be an increase of Christ-likeness that's evident in homes and even among our membership. Again, we're not talking about perfection, here. We don't, we don't attain that until we go to heaven. We are talking about direction, and our trajectory of growth should be apparent to other people as well. If it's not evident, something is out of order; something's wrong.

I hope you can see how the emphasis on repentance is essential to this subject of reconciliation. When we're trying to work out repentance in some issue in our lives, this is going to give legitimacy to our confession of sin. It's going to infuse our request for forgiveness with a strong dose of personal integrity. Our commitment to repentance, it shows others that our stated desire to reconcile with them, it's not a sham. It's genuine. Our commitment to repentance, it helps restore our broken credibility, helps in rebuilding our broken integrity in the sight of the person we've offended, hurt with our sin. After all, if we're not repentant, if we have no intention of changing, that really creates more fundamental questions about where we are with Christ, right?

