

Reconciling with One Another: Repentance, Part 2

Selected Scriptures

So let's get a little more clarity about this issue of repentance and get into our second point. Repentance is the evidence, the outward evidence, you might say, of an unseen faith. There's a sentiment today that says, hey, man, don't judge my heart; I'm right with God. Don't judge based on what you see in my life. That's judgmental, and you have no business telling me about what my private relationship with God is. I'm on good terms with God, and you can't tell me anything to the contrary. That's not the Bible speaking. That's not the Bible speaking. To understand that, see it clearly, we need to look at the theology of repentance.

Let's look at some terms, first. The Old Testament uses two terms to describe repentance: *naham* and *shub*. *Shub*. The first word, I just like saying those Old Testament words, don't you? *Naham*, because you get to do that throat-clearing thing. But *naham*, it refers to an internal sorrow over sin, and that sorrow internally leads to a change of mind, a change of will, and then

a change in life direction. The second word, *shub*, it really does refer to a turning. It could refer to somebody literally walking one way and turning and going in a different direction, that's, that's *shub*. But when it's talking about this issue of repentance, it's looking at it from the external perspective, focusing on the actions and the behavior that reveal an internal change of mind. In particular, the word *shub*, it describes turning from something, like sin, and turning to something, like righteousness. Turning from disobedience and to obedience. Either one of those words can refer to repentance. The only difference in regard to the perspective, either on the internal sorrow with *naham*, or the external action with *shub*. But both terms are repentance terms.

In the New Testament, there are also a couple of terms: *metamelomai* and *metanoëó*. The first word, *metamelomai*, that refers to feelings. It's kind of like *naham*, it refers to feelings of remorse or regret over sin. But keep in mind, those feelings of remorse, they may or may not lead to genuine repentance. Both Judas and Peter felt *metamelomai* over their sin against Jesus. Judas had betrayed him; Peter had denied him. Very significant sins. But their feelings of remorse had different outcomes. Judas felt *metamelomai*, and he went out and hung himself. Peter felt *metamelomai*, and he returned to Christ.

Both felt remorse; only one of them actually repented. The second word, *metanoëó*, that is the unambiguous New Testament word for repentance. *Metanoëó*, it refers fundamentally to an internal change of mind and will, which is going to correspond to that Old Testament *naham*, but it results in an external change of direction, which corresponds to the Old Testament word *shub*. So you might think of *metanoëó* as sort of like those two Old Testament words wrapped into one. It encompasses the internal aspect of *naham* and the external aspect of *shub*.

So those are the words, New Testament, Old Testament. Now let's get in depth and focus on *metanoëó*, and what is it, really. Because this word really encompasses the whole concept of repentance. Repentance, the internal change of mind, demonstrated in external change of direction, going from and going to, this is the evidence of genuine Christian faith. And just like faith, with repentance there are three elements. In biblical faith, three elements, and biblical repentance. There's an intellectual element, there's an emotional element, and there's a volitional element. Intellectual, emotional, volitional.

The intellectual element means you have understood the truth. It's what many people mean when they say, yeah, I believe

in Christianity. I believe in God; I believe in Christ. It's that "the demons believe, but they shudder." It's that kind of belief. They intellectually comprehend and understand the words you're using. But this is a very important issue in reconciling relationships because you have already in your reconciling, you've already in due diligent to that act, you have confessed your sin biblically using biblical terms. Remember that you've examined yourself in the light of the truth of Scripture to determine whether or not that feeling of shame is an accurate indication of the guilt of sin. You identified the sin as sin using biblical terms. So you understand it. You get it. You comprehend it. That's the intellectual component.

There's an emotional component as well, and this means that this emotional component grips you on an emotional level, sometimes even visceral feeling of shame and sorrow. Negatively, you sorrow over your sin, but positively, you long for righteousness in your life. You're zealous to make things right. You long to confess your sin to God and be right. You, you want to confess and reconcile with anyone you've offended, and you are zealous to change, eager to grow, to mature. Another way to describe this element of emotion in repentance is to say you're definitely not indifferent about the issue. You're not unaffected about your sin. You're not dispassionate. Rather, you

find yourself hating your sin, despising it. You're ashamed by it, you're remorseful, and your heart burns and yearns with a deep desire to put distance between yourself and your sin; pursue righteousness instead.

That's the intellectual, the emotional. Now comes the most difficult part for many of us. It's the volitional element, right? It's where our will has to get engaged. This is what's difficult for us. The volitional element of repentance involves the sustained engagement of the will as we purpose to change and bring our behavior into conformity with God's Word and without the engagement of the will, listen, there is no biblical repentance. If your will is not engaged, if you are not volitionally changing, there's no repentance. You say, well, this is hard. Yeah, let me add a word: It's actually impossible. And that's why, just like faith, repentance is a gift of God. It's not a human work. It's not your works. It's God's works. It's God's energy, it's his Word, it's his Spirit, it's his action energizing you, working within you. Do you cooperate in that action? Absolutely, you do. But it's him working in you to both understand, to feel it, and then to make the change.

Look, you can be as remorseful as Judas and never repent, and be trapped in a sin that leads to death. I see that over and

over. It's tragic. You can be like Esau, a profane man, Hebrews 12:16, who rejected his birthright and he exchanged it for a bowl of stew. Hebrews 12:17 tells us, "Afterward, when Esau desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected because he found no chance to repent though he sought it with tears." What a tragic case! But notice, after Esau recognized the depths of his sin, that is the intellectual element, he mourned for it with tears. It's the emotional element. But Hebrews tells us he never repented. Why? Because his remorse stopped short of affecting his will. It never produced repentance. Understanding is essential, but it's not enough. Emotions and tears are evidence of remorse, but they're not evidence, necessarily, of a godly sorrow leading to repentance if they're not accompanied by a change of will demonstrated in a change of behavior.

Again, we're not talking about perfection. We're talking about direction, particularly when it comes to those stubborn, deep-seated sins that the Puritans rightly called besetting sins. You know, those things that were stamped on you when you were young, and they just continue to visit you over the course of your life, and you feel like, when am I ever going to get rid of this? Those are besetting sins. Not talking. We're talking, here, about direction. We're talking about trajectory. It's apparent over time as your sin decreases in frequency and

intensity. When there's an increasing frequency and consistency in obedience to the truth, walking righteously, that's repentance.

We've got our first and second points under the belt. Now we need to understand how repentance is really, you know, the essence of the Christian life. It's the evidence of genuine, saving Christian faith. That's the summary, the theology we've talked about. Let's look at our third point and consider just kind of a practical example of repentance. What does repentance actually look like? Point number three: Repentance is the outworking of godly sorrow. Godly sorrow, and when I say that, that repentance is the outworking of godly sorrow, you understand that the intellectual element has been solved. They've recognized the issue. Godly sorrow means that the emotional element is there as well. So we're going to kind of hone in in this example on the volitional element and see what happened in this situation.

Turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 7. 2 Corinthians 7. This is one of the key passages to show us what true repentance actually looks like. The bulk of the chapter, 2 Corinthians 7:2-16, it's a beautiful, beautiful passage. It illustrates reconciliation between the Apostle Paul and then

this remorseful and repentant Corinthian church. It just portrays an excellent example of a reconciled relationship, here. In 2 Corinthians 7:8, Paul refers to a letter that he had written to the Corinthians, one that made them grieve. That's a reference to 1 Corinthians, which if you've read that letter, you know it's a letter of rebuke to a church that was producing the rotten fruit of a deep-seated pride. So Paul had to rebuke the Corinthians, and he wrote that first letter. But then, when some false apostles infiltrated the Corinthian church, they influenced the leaders of the church to spurn that letter. So Paul paid them a personal visit. He administered a little apostolic discipline, which he mentions in 2 Corinthians 2:1-3. And for Paul, although it pained him to write a letter of rebuke, it, it pained him to visit for the sake of punishment, he did it gladly, gladly because he loved them.

Listen, that is the bold, confrontational side of Christian love, and sometimes leaders need to exercise that kind of love. Sometimes Christians need to exercise that kind of love with one another. When that kind of love is lacking, I'd make the case that there is no love at all because God demonstrated this kind of love toward us when he confronted us of our sin and rebuked us and turned us to Christ. You're never going to know why Jesus

is the solution until you understand why you are the problem and your sin is the problem, right?

So although it pained him, he loved them. Look at verse 8 and notice his attitude. "Even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a little while, and as it is I rejoice not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief so that you suffered no loss through us." He's rejoicing, here, because the Corinthians ultimately repented in this matter. There was a systemic sin in the Corinthian church which threatened to tear this church apart and absolutely destroy it. It's apparent in the first letter. The second letter reveals the influence of false teachers, who were turning this entire church against the apostolic foundation laid by Paul. But there was a godly element within the church, and by God's grace, they came to their senses. They took courage. They rose up. They dealt with the sinful people and the sin in their midst. And they followed Paul's counsel; they sought fellowship with him. This is such a beautiful picture of the process of restorative church discipline at work. A church that was threatened with extinction is now restored into health and life. Even though this incident was painful, not just for the Corinthians, but most especially

for this soft-hearted Apostle. Listen, even in a difficult situation like this, you know who's most hurt? It's the godly person because the ungodly person doesn't feel a thing. Their hearts are calloused. They have no affection. They have no feeling toward those whom they're sinning against. It's the one who's soft-hearted, he's sorrowing.

He says, "It's necessary," verse 10, "for godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death." You want to illustrate that verse in your mind? Think Judas and Peter. Judas and Peter. Their repentance honored God, these Corinthians, because they learned to fear God rather than man, and God granted them restoration. But notice, notice how Paul could tell that this church was truly repentant. We've already been reading it, hearing the evidence in what we've read; but here is the clearest proof in verse 11, "For seeing what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves," what, "what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment at every point you proved yourself innocent in the matter."

True repentance started when they mourned over their sin, verses 7-8. It began with an intellectual and an emotional

component. They understood, and they reacted to that understanding with godly sorrow. But that sorrow led, it didn't stop there, it led to turning from sin and turning to righteousness. And in verse 11, you can see six evidences of repentance. This helps us see what true repentance looks like.

First, the Corinthians sought to clear themselves of the charge. "What eagerness to clear yourselves," he said. They didn't do so with mere words. They did it with an undeniable action. They confessed their sins, sought to make it right by doing what was right. True repentance is a process of correction of righting the wrong. Secondly, Paul saw what indignation? The truth stirred up within them, a holy anger, a sense of righteous indignation. They were indignant about the sin in their midst, their own sin, the sin of the offenders, over the shame, the reproach this ordeal brought upon the church. True repentance inflames righteous passions.

Third, Paul noted what fear? They feared God's displeasure over their sin, specifically by heeding Paul's corrective. True repentance establishes an attitude of God-centered fear, more concerned about pleasing God, not about pleasing man. Fourthly, Paul said, "what longing?" What longing. What longing? They longed to be reconciled to Paul, verse 7. The word longing means

they recognized their need; their need of his ministry, their need of his, his fellowship. They didn't want to do without Paul. They didn't want to see his ministry go away, his association. So they dealt with their sin out of a longing for a right relationship with him. Again, true repentance seeks to reconcile relationships; does whatever it takes.

Number five: Paul noted the Corinthians' zeal. Zeal, that's a word that's marked with a strong sense of dedication or righteousness, that commitment so strong that the word zeal is often translated jealousy. Jealous. True repentance is a deep commitment. It's fueled by a jealous zeal. That is to say, there is no satisfying, dissuading, turning zeal aside. It will get what it's after. Zeal. Number six: Paul heard the report of the punishment they'd inflicted on the offender. They demonstrated their repentance by correcting that former indifference to sin, that, that sense of giving sin a pass. Grace actually deals with sin. Grace is not indifferent to sin. They finally got it. They dealt with it. They didn't want to see sin repeated, and so what did they do? They inflicted punishment. Why? For the sake of loving the offender, for the sake of the health of the church. True repentance takes measures to prevent sin from happening, which again could mean that punishment is appropriate.

God-given sorrow had produced an earnestness in them, which caused them to do whatever it would take to, to deal with sin, to clear themselves of the charges. And Paul sums it up in verse 11, saying, "At every point, you proved yourselves innocent in the matter." Not sinless, mind you, innocent. They took the appropriate action to put things right. That's innocence. They turned from reluctance to deal with sin; they turned it into a condition of innocence by dealing with that sin. They dealt with it appropriately and righteously.

Now hopefully you notice the theological elements of repentance that showed up in that passage. We saw *naham*, and we saw *shub*; we saw *metamelomai* and we saw *metanoëó*, both the internal and external elements, the turning from sin, the turning to righteousness. We saw the intellectual and the emotional at work. We saw the volitional elements there as well. Genuine repentance, all of it portrayed in a single verse, 2 Corinthians 7:11. Excellent verse for you to memorize, and as you strive to work out repentance in your own life and in your relationships, think about that verse. Test your repentance against that pattern and see how it measures up. If it's not there, and listen, beloved, it often isn't. Why? Because we are sometimes so heard-hearted, sometimes so dull of understanding. Sometimes we can understand the terms, the words, but it's just

not gripping us emotionally. We just don't get the sorrow that we should have. And even when we do sorrow over it, then, then we fail and falter in our putting repentance into effect in manifest change in our lives and our wills.

Beloved, I, I'm there with you. It is hard, and I said it before, I'll say it again: Apart from the grace of God, it is impossible to do this. This is a grace of God working in and through your life. So if you find yourself falling short of repentance, join the club. But don't stay there. Get on your knees and pray. Get on your knees and pray because God will grant the grace. Why? He wants to see us work this out. This is what he saved us to; is to live this way.

That's how we carry through in this matter of reconciling relationships, and as I said at the beginning, repentance is the crowning jewel of reconciliation because it not only deals with sin, past sin, by forsaking it. It also strives to prevent future sin by growing in righteousness. Repentance is the essence of the Christian life. It's the evidence of an unseen faith. It's the outworking of a godly sorrow. And look, if we'll commit ourselves as individuals and as a corporate body, if we commit ourselves to be repentant Christians, our relationships are going to grow close, aren't they? They're going to grow

intimate. They're going to grow rock solid because we're going to see each other at our best and our worst, aren't we? That's where things really take shape.

In humility before God, in an attitude of meekness toward one another, we're going to learn to re-establish trust with each other, to build credibility as we honor one another by carrying out biblical reconciliation to its very end. It's not just a matter of not sinning. That's just the start. It's also a matter of righteous living, righteous living which is going to promote unity, harmony, and maturity in our church. Let's pray.

Father, we have heard your Word and we understand. We also recognize, though, that it goes beyond our need to intellectually grasp and comprehend, but it really needs to take, take shape and take a grip in our heart. And for that we come before you this morning, admitting that we are often dull and hard-hearted, and we need you to penetrate through that callousness that's built up. And we ask you to soften our hearts, to help us to grasp the need for working out repentance before you, that we might please you, that we might love others. Help us to be grasped in a sense of remorse, a sense of sorrow over sin, a sense of zeal and longing for righteousness.

And then help us, Father, to have wisdom in putting together strategies and tactics for how we might, according to a will bent on pleasing you, that we might pursue repentance in practical ways. It's not just about stopping sinning, Father. We all long to do that. But it's also about living righteously, we'd not only put off, but we would put on, that we would walk in the Spirit and there would be no room for walking in the flesh.