

Drawn to True Repentance

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Welcome. We're very glad that you are with us, each and every one of you, to be with us as we continue our study of God's word. I feel a little bit out of rhythm here. I haven't preached on Tuesday night for three weeks, with Kevin filling in last week and John MacArthur, yeah, that guy being with us two weeks prior. It's been three weeks since I've been here so I want to start with just a little bit of review. We had been spending a couple of weeks on Tuesday talking about the doctrine of repentance and without repentance, there is no salvation. So it's very important for us to know what true repentance is and we kind of got into that by the things that we were considering at the end of the Sermon on the Mount as Jesus warned about the two foundations and one house built on the rock stood when the storm hit it, the other built on the sand fell when the storm hit it, and we saw something very important at the end of Matthew 7 and I want you to take a quick look at it. My friend, Phil Collins, kind of was reminding me of this just before the service and it was something worthwhile to add to the introduction here kind of spontaneously.

Matthew 7:28 says that,

28 When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; 29 for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

And we said something about that that I think bears repeating. The fact that they were amazed at his teaching was no indication that they had actually repented of their sins and put their trust in Christ. Perhaps some of them did, but the mere fact that someone is amazed at the teaching of Jesus or that he has a favorite Bible teacher or that he likes coming to church, that is no indication of true repentance at all. We need to think carefully about these things for a couple of reasons. One, so that we would discern our own hearts correctly, that we ourselves have responded properly to Christ in a way that brings salvation; and also for those of us that are in Christ, that we would be able to help those that we talk to, our friends, our loved ones, our coworkers, to help them think rightly about what true saving faith looks like, what true repentance looks like, and I won't belabor verses 21 to 23 which we spent so much time on, that there will be many who are surprised at the day of judgment. So this is one of the most critical matters that we could study.

For those of you who don't know the very beginning history of our church, it was a 71 minute message on repentance that was kind of at the beginning of our church that took place in another place, and that led to conversations that led to the founding of Truth Community Church, so I love this doctrine for many many reasons and it's one that has been central to our church from the very beginning so I don't mind teaching on the topic repeatedly and trying to bring out different angles of it from time to time so that this would be clear in our minds. You know, Christ is great, right? Christ is the eternal Son of God. Sin is a great offense against God and these are deep and profound matters and Christ is the eternal Son of God, he is the second person of the Godhead, and so we should think and we should realize that to come to him is something that is a profound matter, not something that is superficial and light. It's one of the reasons I'm stepping far away from my notes here, it's one of the reasons why I'm very uncomfortable with the practice of baptizing very young children at the age of six or seven or eight years old, as is so common in other churches. It's not that young children cannot be saved and cannot have a genuine faith, but it is so easy for them to just want to please their parents or to please a pastor with their response, without having a genuine sense of sin and a genuine sense of what the Bible describes as true repentance, and in our eagerness to have young people baptized and in our eagerness to add to numbers, sometimes I don't think we do them justice over the long course of their lives because without doubt, many young people get baptized at that age who are not truly regenerate and then they are affirmed as Christians early in their lives and then when they start to live a life of sin, they are still affirmed in their salvation even though there was no reason to think that they were regenerate to begin with. That is a very serious danger that churches should be far more careful about than what they are. Baptism is supposed to be an outward reflection of a true deep inward change that has taken place and it should not be treated superficially, and when you just run through children and you post pictures because you think they look cute in the water, you're really doing a disservice to the nature of salvation, and I believe that globally speaking and speaking not in individual situations but just as a pattern, that we do a great disservice to our young people when we do that. We teach them that this is something elementary and basic and easy without perhaps them ever having really had to think at a mature level about what it means to be a sinner in the presence of a holy God.

So I don't know why that came out now because I hadn't planned that at all, but that needs to be said and that's the position of our church and that is not subject to change. So part of the reason that we hold to that is because we have a high view of the doctrine of repentance and what we did in the prior two weeks or so when I was teaching, is that we examined many reactions to sin and to judgment that fell short of true repentance, and these things that I'm about to describe left men in their guilt, and these are all biblical illustrations of things that I won't go back to the passages again, but we saw that regret alone is not repentance. Simply having regret over your wrongdoing, your prior wrongdoing, is not alone an indication of repentance. We saw that Judas Iscariot in Matthew 27 felt remorse, felt regret over his sin but he did not turn to Christ. He committed suicide and that is the truest surest evidence that there was no heart for Christ; that there had been no change in his mind about Christ. He simply wanted to end the

weight of guilt that he felt without turning to Christ in it. So regret alone is not repentance.

We saw, secondly, that the mere fact that someone witnesses miracles, that miracles do not have the power to produce repentance in someone's heart. In Luke 16, we read that a man who rejects Moses, who rejects the teaching of Scripture, will not repent. They will also reject, it says, a man who comes to them from the dead. You remember that the rich man who was in Hades was begging father Abraham to send Lazarus back to warn his brothers so that they would not come to this place of torment, and father Abraham told them, he said, "That's not going to do any good. They have Moses. Let them hear Moses." And he argued, showing his own lack of repentance even as he was suffering the torments of judgment. He said, "But no, father Abraham, if they have a man that comes from the dead, they'll listen." And he said, "No, they won't. If they won't hear the Scriptures, they won't listen to a man who comes from the dead again." That's why this word is so important. It is a response to this word that is going to produce repentance or not, not something external, something that is apart from the Scriptures.

Let me go off on another tangent that I had to deal with several years ago that needs to be said, although I'm not aware of it ever being an issue here within our church. There are lots of people who get excited about supposed sightings of Jesus within the Muslim world. Perhaps you've heard of this and heard stories that Muslims are seeing visions of Christ and are supposedly coming to faith in Christ because they are seeing visions of him. Don't be sucked into that silly mindset because, look, first of all, the Bible says that Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light and so the fact that someone sees a supernatural vision is no indication that they are saying anything from God. Furthermore, the thing that concerns me so greatly about immediately wanting to baptize these testimonies as being indications of coming to true faith in Christ, is that these visions are happening apart from any involvement with the Scriptures, apart from the word of God at all, and it is the word of God that God uses to produce true repentance in the heart of a man, of a woman. Repentance is in response to the word of God. You have these dear people who are already in a false religion being further confirmed in deception by demonic appearances, if the visions are real at all. There is no reason to think that this is something that is producing true faith in Christ when it is happening apart from the word of God, apart from the reading of the word of God, apart from the preaching of the word of God, apart from an understanding of the word of God, because it is in the word where Christ is truly revealed and we cannot be sucked into silly things and emotional things that are apart from the word of God and think that somehow we are dealing with the true realm of salvation. As soon you depart from the word of God, you are vulnerable to satanic deception.

So we as individuals and we as a church, we have to cling tightly to this word because this word is our life, this word is our hope, this word is what gives us the true discernment that we need in order to know the realities of these things. Once you close your Bible and walk away from it and start talking about salvation apart from the explained word of God, you are in a realm that is just waiting to suck you up in deception. That's how important the word of God is in all of these things. So we want to

be careful. We want to be discerning. We don't want to just get on the bandwagon of what everybody else is saying, what everybody else is excited about. It's exactly appropriate to test the spirits as 1 John 4:1 says, to see whether they be of God, and the only way you can truly test the spirits is by comparing them to what Scripture says and that's all we're trying to do here tonight and every time that we gather together. So I've offended a lot of people already, I might as well keep going, right? I really don't care. I really don't care. The truth is what matters.

Now, so we've said regret alone is not necessarily repentance, regret alone is not repentance; that miracles do not produce repentance; thirdly, we said that approaching death does not even necessarily produce repentance, and we reminded ourselves, we reminded ourselves from Scripture that there were two thieves on the cross, one of them did repent and one of them did turn to Christ, one of them did cry out for mercy and say, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom," but there was a second one who was also on the verge of death who did not. He went to his death rebuking Christ, rejecting Christ. So we see that approaching death does not produce repentance necessarily, that is not an indication of anything.

Finally we saw from Revelation 9 and Revelation 16 that even the judgment of God does not produce repentance in and of itself. The men in Revelation 9 and 16 refused to repent even when God had slain a third of humanity with his judgment, and Scripture specifically says they still did not repent. They still did not repent even when such great pressure had been brought upon them externally.

So we realize that repentance is, comparatively speaking, a rare thing. Comparatively speaking, we need to understand what it is that brings about repentance and what true repentance looks like, and with that said, we quoted, I believe, from the Shorter Catechism, the Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 87, "What is repentance?" Having said this is not repentance, now let's get into the good stuff and say what is true repentance and trust God and ask God to open our minds, to open our understanding, to illuminate us so that we would understand these things deeply; that those of us that are in Christ would be anchored further, confirmed to say, "Yes, this work of God has happened in my heart and I come away from this stronger, more certain, because I see what Scripture describes as having happened to me." That's a great place to be. And for those of us that perhaps have had a veil over our eyes, you know, I'm hoping, trusting, praying that God would remove the veil for us as we consider these things.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 87 says, "What is repentance?" And it answers it with this phrase. It's a little bit long. I'll read it a little bit slowly. "Repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin," I'm going to paraphrase it to help the wording just a little bit, "and seeing the mercy of God in Christ, with grief and hatred of his sin, turns from it to God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience." There's a lot in there. Let me read it again. "Repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin and seeing the mercy of God in Christ, with grief and hatred of his sin, turns from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience." In repentance there is a new mind that is brought to

pass. There is a turning, there is a change of mind that takes place, a change of mind toward God, a change of mind toward sin, where before the sinner loved his sin, according to John 3, perhaps was ignorant of his sin, unaware of the offense that his life was to a holy God, now in repentance a new mind comes upon him and he sees that differently. Whereas before the things he accepted and loved, he now turns and hates. He has a new mind towards sin and as this definition brings out and as we hope to emphasize a little bit later in our message here this evening, in true repentance, in true repentance there is a recognition that in the Lord Jesus Christ there is mercy and salvation offered to him so that in true repentance you are not simply feeling remorse about your sin, you're not simply looking backwards and saying, "I have been a wicked sinner," in true repentance there is a turn to Christ to embrace the offer of mercy that is made in the Gospel, and you embrace Christ in true repentance. It's not simply the negative response to your prior sin, there is a positive turning and embracing of Christ that takes place. There is an understanding that mercy is offered in Christ and you turn from sin to God with a full purpose of pursuing obedience henceforth and forevermore.

Now, as we've said many times, that is an inward turning. That is not, as it is so often misrepresented by people that do not understand the Gospel, we are not talking about somebody doing works in order to be saved, we are talking about what is the nature of saving faith. Saving faith is a repentant faith like that, a repentant faith that says, "I turn away from sin and I embrace Christ who forgives me and cleanses me from sin." There is this turning and true faith in Christ is a repentant faith that is repelled by sin and comes to embrace Christ as a result. So there is this inner turning that takes place in repentance and repentance is more than an emotional reaction to outward circumstances. There are so many ways to go wrong on this, aren't there? Repentance is not produced by 10 verses of "Just As I Am," waiting for one more, "I'm waiting for one more to come down the aisle." That's, you know, and you're playing on the emotions. That's not the way to produce true repentance. True repentance is a fruit of grace from God in the heart and it cannot be brought about by artificial means. Scripture makes it plain that God is the one who grants repentance. 2 Timothy 2:25 says, "with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth."

So all of that was introduction and now the question is: what does the genuine repentance that God produces look like? What are the elements of true repentance? How can we recognize the real thing? And we want to illustrate this, we're just going to use Scripture illustrations to make our point here this evening. First of all, we can say this building on the things that we have already said, first of all: true repentance has a true sense of sin. True repentance has a true sense of sin, and I would invite you to turn to the book of Acts 2, beginning in verse 36. Peter is preaching on the day of Pentecost and he is telling the Jews that they had crucified their own Messiah and he says in verse 32,

32 "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses."

Notice immediately that the context of the repentance that we are going to see is in the context of the proclamation of Jesus Christ and him crucified. Verse 33,

33 "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear."

They had observed the Holy Spirit falling upon the believers. They were speaking in other tongues, known languages, not idle babble, and so Peter is explaining to them what they are saying and in verse 34 he says,

34 "For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'The Lord said to My Lord, "Sit at My right hand, 35 until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.'"

So Peter is proclaiming to them the resurrected and ascended to Christ and says, "This is the Jesus that I am preaching to you. This explains the miracles that you see in front of you. Then he says in verse 36 and I love the dogmatism with which he speaks here in verse 36, he says,

36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified."

"You're the man," so to speak. "You crucified the Son of God. You Jews crucified him when you handed him over to Pilate so that Pilate would carry out the deed under Roman law." And what was the response of them to this powerful preaching? Look at verse 37, he says,

37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart

They were convicted of their specific sin of what they had done when Christ was in their hands and yet, beloved, here is what I want you to see as we distinguish true repentance from the false versions that we have seen before. This is so very critical to see. They were pierced, they were convicted but they realized that something was missing. They needed to do something in response to this conviction that had been brought to bear on their heart,

and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"

They recognized their guilt, they understood that they were guilty, but they realized that they needed something more; that guilt, the conviction alone was not enough. The sense of shame and accountability alone did not relieve them of the judgment which had now been proclaimed upon them and which had been brought about and convicted in their heart. They knew that that wasn't enough. And it's interesting, isn't it, for as much as our charismatic friends, my third group I'm making angry here tonight, it's interesting that our charismatic friends want to talk about speaking in tongues and the display of the Holy Spirit but when you read the chapter all the way through, here's where it brings you, it brings you to a proclamation of the risen Christ and a conviction of sin produced by the

preaching of the Gospel. Read the whole chapter, not just verse 4, my charismatic friends. Not that there is an element of that in our church. Just read the context, for heaven's sake.

But they say, "Brethren, what shall we do?" They recognized that they needed something more. They had a true sense of their sin – watch it – they had a true sense of sin in response to the proclamation of the crucified and risen Christ that was being borne out of a proclamation of the word of God. If someone wants to know, "Is my repentance genuine?" one of the first things I would try to help them with and ask them is, "Is your sense of conviction of sin, is your sense of the Gospel a response to the word of God explained to you, the word of God read to you, the word of God reading it for yourself? Is this inner response that you have a reaction to the word of God itself?" That's what you see going on here in Acts 2. Their's was. Their's was and they were pierced inside but they knew they needed more. They needed something beyond the conviction in order to resolve the guilt that had been brought to bear upon them. In order to deal with their guilt, they needed something else. What was the "else" that they needed?

Secondly, repentance sees mercy offered in Christ. Repentance sees mercy offered in Christ. It's a Christ-centered focus, a Christ-centered turning that takes place in true repentance. So they asked the million dollar question in verse 37, "Brethren, in light of our guilt, what shall we do?" And Peter speaking under the power of the Holy Spirit says to them this in verse 38,

38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." 40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!"

In true repentance, brothers and sisters, my friends, in true repentance – this is so very important – in true repentance, the sinner understands that mercy, an offer of mercy is being presented to him in the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, repentance happens in the context of faith. Look at verse 41,

41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

They received the word. In other words, they believed what was being preached to them. They received Christ as he was presented to them, as we have seen earlier in verses 33 through 36, Christ as the one risen from the dead, Christ crucified for sinners, Christ ascended on high, that Christ is the one that you must receive, and their baptism was an outward sign of the inward turning that God required from them. They renounced themselves. They renounced their prior sin of crucifying Christ. They turned from it and they turned not just away from sin,, they turned to Christ in order to receive him.

They saw that mercy was offered in Christ and, beloved, this is one really critical component of distinguishing false repentance from true repentance, and I venture to say that some of you need to hear this and this is a relief, this is a grace for us to be able to hear from God's word that it is like this. Repentance, true biblical repentance, is not a call for you to sink in unending guilt and remorse over your past sins. The idea is to move beyond that sense of conviction to realize that Christ in his crucifixion and resurrection has paid for that guilt so that you no longer carry it on your account. The idea of repentance is to turn to Christ so that he could relieve your guilt and bring you into his family with a full sense of forgiveness and acceptance by the God that you had previously rejected and by the God whom in your sin you had so greatly offended.

Repentance, true repentance relieves guilt rather than leaving the sinner in guilt. That's vital to understand. As much as I'm not impressed with Muslim visions of Christ, as much as we look at that and say with grief, "That's not the real thing," with equal grief, we look at those who are bound in guilt and remorse and, "Oh, I've so offended God. I've so offended God. I've so offended God," and that's all that they can say, we look and say, "That's not true repentance either," because in true repentance, there is a turning to Christ for mercy. Away from sin. Guilt over sin, yes, but turning to Christ for mercy, for forgiveness. In humility, coming to Christ. You see, true repentance abandons self and abandons sin but it also is an abandonment of self to the point that you say, "Yes, I'm guilty and now, Christ, I come to you as my all-in-all. I come to you in order that you would take away my guilt rather than me simply staying in it on my own." Repentance sees mercy offered in Christ. That's so vital, and seeing that offer of mercy, turns from sin to him.

Here in Acts 2, the conviction led to repentance. Now let me remind you what we said three weeks ago about Acts 7. You remember that Stephen preached a similar message. The Jews hated him for it and they killed him, right? They stoned him. Stephen's preaching pierced the Jews in Acts 7. They killed him. That was not repentance obviously. Here in Acts 2, these brothers in Christ, that we will meet one day in heaven, were grieved over their sin, they disowned it, and in their grief they turned to Christ for salvation. Look at it there again in verse 41, they "received his word, they were baptized, and that day they were added about three thousand souls." The Jews in Acts 7 rejected the word and stoned the messenger. The Jews in Acts 2 received the word, received Christ, were forgiven, were baptized and were added to the church, 3,000 of them. I'm jealous of Peter to be able to preach with that kind of power.

William Chamberlain in his book "The Meaning of Repentance" says this about Acts 2 and Acts 7, he says, "From these two incidents we learn that a sense of guilt may cause very different reactions. It may lead one man to repentance. It may make another a howling demon thirsting for the blood of the man who pricked his conscience." You see, it's not just the piercing of the conscience, it's not just the conviction of sin that is true repentance. Both groups, both audiences feeling the weight of guilt, one turns to murder to satisfy the burden on his heart, the other turns to Christ for forgiveness. So we see that we have to look for more than simply a sense of guilt and conviction; we realize that in true repentance, there is a recognition of mercy offered in Christ and a turning from sin to

receive that mercy so freely, graciously, lovingly, kindly, mercifully offered to the sinner in Christ.

The Apostle Paul gives a similar distinction. Turn to 2 Corinthians 7. I just had a flash picture in my mind of the howling demon thing coming out and picturing going out in the parking lot and there is a group of Muslims and a group of charismatics and a group of early baptizers all waiting to take my head. I don't think that's going to happen, but pictures flash in my mind that are kind of scary.

2 Corinthians 7:9, Paul says,

9 I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful [you were sorrowful, alright], but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us.

It's not just that you were sorrowful, you were made sorrowful all the way to repentance, and he says in verse 10,

10 For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

There is sorrow according to the will of God produced by the proclamation of Christ to sinners that produces repentance; that men turn to Christ seeking mercy in their guilt that is distinct from a simple sorrow over sin that does not lead to an actual inward turning to Christ. These things are abundantly clear in the Bible.

So what we say about repentance is this: repentance is joined with faith with an understanding, with a conviction that Jesus Christ is the Savior that God has appointed for sinners. He is the Savior of the world in the sense that he is the only Savior the world has. There is only one Savior. There is no other. "There is salvation in no one else for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved," Acts 4:12. So in true repentance, there is a recognition that Christ is offered to sinners and turning to him for his grace, and when the sinner understands that, he sees Christ, he is convinced of the reality of who Christ is, that the biblical claims of Christ are true, that they are undeniable, convinced of that, convinced of sin, the sinner flees to Christ to save him. He hurries to Christ. He cries out to Christ and says, "I am guilty. You must save me. Be merciful to me, the sinner."

Do you see in that thing from Luke 18 which we'll look at in a few Sundays, you see the elements of true repentance there in Luke 18:9 through 14, the tax collector who was unwilling to even look up to heaven because he was so convicted of his guilt, standing away from the Pharisee who was boasting in pride of who he was. "I thank you, O God, that I'm not like these other men." And Jesus says there is a tax collector off to the side unwilling to look up to heaven and he said, "Be merciful to me, the sinner," as he was

beating his chest and Jesus said, "That's the man who went away justified." Beloved, do you see it? Do you see in that example as well? "Be merciful to me." He cries out for mercy simultaneous with his conviction of sin and so he flees to Christ to save him, by faith he receives Christ and rests in Christ alone as the sufficient salvation of his soul. True repentance, in other words, sees the finality of Christ, recognizes that in Christ full salvation is provided and I don't keep working to earn merit after that. Oh, my life changes. I bring forth good works but it is in response to Christ's favor, not to earn Christ's favor. There is the difference between heaven and hell in that understanding.

Tell me, some of you tell me after the service, explain to me something in response to what we're seeing tonight, someone explained to me the entire philosophy of ministry that thinks the best thing that we can do for sinners is to entertain them and be likable and to make them laugh or to give them a little bump of self-esteem or to help them with a little bit of a self-improvement 20 minute little thing? Tell me how in God's name do you justify a philosophy of ministry like that when Scripture is so clear about what true salvation is? What are you trying to do in that kind of ministry? There is no excuse for that. Some, no doubt, do it out of ignorance because that's just what they were taught to do, but some know and their culpability before a holy God will be great because there will be a stricter judgment to those who taught. I appreciated what Pastor MacArthur said, he's doing everything he can to minimize the trauma when he stands before God, the accountability, the great accountability of teaching God's word to sinners. There was a man many centuries ago, the name slips me, it's a famous quote, says, "I preach as a dying man to dying men. I preach as if never to preach again, as a dying man to dying men." That's the urgency that animates the true preaching of the Gospel. The preacher himself realizes, "I'm a wisp. I'm a vapor." And he looks at his audience and says, "You're a wisp and a vapor also." So there is an urgency that animates true preaching that should never be despised, that never should be compromised by suggesting by your demeanor that something less than eternal matters are at stake here. Beloved, that's why we do what we do.

So there's a final aspect of repentance that we should not miss. Third point here is that repentance has a true turn toward obedience. Repentance has a true turn toward obedience and I invite you to turn to Ephesians 4. The unique and common characteristic of non-Christians, of sinners, is this according to the Bible: they can be known by their alienation and hostility toward the true God. They are alienated from God, they are hostile to the true God. They may be trying to pursue their own form of righteousness but it is not according to truth and, therefore, it is not acceptable to God. It would be like going to the bank with a stack of monopoly money to pay your mortgage and say, "Look at all the money I've got. Here, I want to pay off my mortgage." And the bank says, "Don't be so foolish. That's not real currency. That doesn't pay for anything." That's God's response to those who try to earn their own salvation, who try to be good enough, who create their own system of works and say, "If I do this, surely God will be pleased with me." No, it's monopoly money. It has no value in the bank of God and sinners, even if they are looking for trying to work out their salvation, they can be known by their alienation and hostility toward God.

Look at verse 17 of Ephesians 4. The Apostle Paul says,

17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

That's a pretty dark picture of humanity but absolutely accurate because we are reading the inspired inerrant word of God, and that is the scriptural judgment on the mind of unsaved men. But what do you find in the true Christian? What do you find in the one who has repented and forsaken sin and turned to Christ and received him? Verse 20, again notice the Christ-centered nature of these things. He says,

20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

The spirit of the mind of the one who has truly repented is marked by a separation from that former manner of thinking in life and is now animated by principles of righteousness, of holiness, of truth, and their mind, they now have a new mind that is operating at the core of their heart. Rather than being engaged with their former futility, there is an engagement, there is an embracing, there is a love, there is a submission to truth, and the mind of the old man has passed away, 2 Corinthians 5:21, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Behold, the old things have passed away. Behold, new things have come." What are those new things? It's a mind that is devoted to righteousness and truth and the pursuit of holiness in Christ, and in its seminal form, in its seed form, repentance has that, laying aside the old mind, laying aside the old man and turning to Christ for new life. And when you remember that repentance is a work of God, that repentance is something that is granted by God to the human heart, you can see why it would be that way, that there is a power to it.

Beloved, think about it. Think about, this is part of the miracle of regeneration. By the way, I believe that God still works miracles. I believe that every time a man is born again, a miracle has taken place because a new mind, a new heart has been planted in him from above that he could never do on his own. He could never produce that on his own. A total reversal where once he loved his sin, now he hates it; once he was ignorant of God, now he knows him. Truly knows him. Whereas before this precious book once was a closed locked book that he could not understand, now he opens and he reads with understanding. With joy surging through his heart. With a newfound spirit pulsating through his veins.

The true reality of true repentance because the Holy Spirit changes, renews the mind to produce harmony with God.

Turn over to Colossians 3:9. Colossians 3:9 says,

9 "Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, [in salvation you laid aside that old man and all the evil that attended him] 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him."

The old mind put aside, the new mind, the new self renewed according to the true knowledge of God as he is revealed in Scripture.

Titus 3:4. Again, you just see these themes of mercy and Christ and newness of mind emphasized repeatedly in New Testament teaching about salvation. Verse 4, and keeping in mind what we looked at on Sunday, the five words of Gospel hope, of grace and kindness and mercy and the others, you see this theme repeated here in Titus 3:4,

4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, [salvation came because God is kind, because he is loving] 5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Christ-centered mercy. A Christ-centered renewal of the mind produced by the work of the Holy Spirit. When you see this aspect of the mind involved in repentance, and everything that we've said here tonight, beloved, I'm almost done even though I don't want to be. I'd like to go another hour and a half. When you see this aspect of repentance, when you understand the biblical teaching on repentance, something really crucial emerges for you to understand. Repentance, I'm repeating myself from 30 minutes ago, repentance is not primarily introspective remorse that looks back to the past in shame over all of your sins. Repentance, beloved – oh, my hands are almost shaking here – repentance, true repentance is a turning to Christ in a new direction of life, forsaking the old to pursue something new, forsaking trust in self, forsaking sin to receive Christ and to turn to him and to pursue him with a disposition of obedience. That's true repentance.

So we're not impressed by those who would cut themselves and inflict pain upon themselves in an effort to atone for their sins, that sometimes you see foolish people doing in the Philippines and in Catholicism and other places, trying to reenact the sufferings of Christ and trying to crucify themselves. That's not repentance. That's not real. That's a foolish effort at works in self-righteousness. Your own blood cannot atone for your own sins. It takes the blood of someone else because your blood is guilty. It takes the blood of an innocent Lamb to take away sin.

William Chamberlain again, says this about the nature of true repentance. It's a little bit of a lengthy quote. Stay with me. In true repentance, quote, "The whole of a man's nature and his viewpoints are changed when a man is in Christ Jesus. Somehow a creative activity of God works through the message of the crucified Savior preached by sending men to a world in sin and revolt, and so God changes the minds of men from the mind of the flesh to the mind of Christ. Repentance is produced as the Holy Spirit works within the human life transforming its aspirations, ideals, ambitions and viewpoints. The central theme upon which the Spirit plays is the message of a crucified Savior. The response to this infinite love is repentance." And if I might say, amen.

You see, beloved, repentance is not a one-time crisis resolved in a moment with a counselor after an invitation to a sinner's bench. Repentance, true repentance is marked by a forsaking of sin throughout life with a new mind that is in submission to Christ and is in conformity to his will. Not sinless. Not perfect. But recognizing as the fundamental controlling disposition of the heart that I am oriented toward Christ. I want to obey him even when I fail, even when I fall short. That is repentance. That is the reality of the work of God.

So beloved, are you aware of your sin? Do you see mercy in the hands of Christ? Have you turned to him in faith with an obedient mind, an obedient disposition? "I want to follow you. You said, 'Follow Me,' Lord, amen, I will follow you. Give me strength. Help me to do so even as I stumble so badly along the way." Peter said in response to the third question that Jesus asked him in John 21, "Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you. Lord, I realize that there is not a lot of evidence outwardly speaking to support that, what I just said, but Lord, look at my heart. In my heart, I love you." John Murray in his book that we recommend, "Redemption Accomplished and Applied," says this and I quote, "The specific character of repentance is to turn from sin to God. The specific character of faith is to receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation."

May God confirm the things that we have seen from his word tonight to each one of you. May God bless you as you seek Christ according to the revelation of God contained in the 66 books of the Bible and made specifically clear in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Father, help us all to that end. Do the work which only you can do. Our blood, our works can't save us, Lord. We can only be saved by the work and the shed blood of someone outside us, alien, as it were, to our own existence, something that we did not contribute to, the mercy of God offered to us in a crucified and risen Savior. Father, I plead with you again to save souls here in this room in response to your word and the work of your Spirit in each heart. For those of us that you have saved, Father, Lord, help us to render to you an appropriate spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving for doing such a great work in our hearts that was beyond our power, that was not even within the realm of our desires at one point in time in our lives, and now you have given us a gift, a pearl of great price, something so great, so valuable. May we cherish our salvation. Nay, more, may we cherish our Christ more and more and more until we see him face-to-face. We pray these things in the matchless, wonderful, brilliant name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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