

I RESTORE HIM FOURFOLD

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Reformation Day was three days ago. This is the day on which many Protestants commemorate Martin Luther's posting for debate his *Ninety-five Theses*, which they mark as the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Luther, in his *Ninety-five Theses*, criticized abuse of the indulgence system in his time, and implied the doctrine of justification by faith. To understand his criticism, one must first understand the indulgence system, and to understand the indulgence system, one must first understand the doctrine of the Sacrament of Penance. In Roman Catholic theology, sinners obtain God's pardon by the sacrament of Penance, and the penitent sinner performs three acts. Firstly, he is contrite. Contrition is "sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1451) Secondly, he to a priest confesses his sins, for a priest has authority to grant absolution. Thirdly, he makes satisfaction, which is to say, he expiates his sins by making amends. If the sinner does not make satisfaction in this life, then must must do so in the next, in Purgatory. An indulgence remits this temporal punishment of satisfaction. With an indulgence, the pope draws merit from a treasury, and he applies it to the sinner who is deficient in merit. He may apply it to the living and to the dead. The pope may grant an indulgence to one who pays money to the church. In Martin Luther's day, the pope granted indulgences so that he might have the capital to rebuild Saint Peter's cathedral in Rome. It was at this abuse that Luther aimed his Theses. His first three theses are:

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.
2. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy.
3. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh

His sixty-second thesis is, "The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God." In Luther's time, some sought indulgences without contrition. They sought forgiveness without repentance. Luther and the other Protestant Reformers recovered the doctrine that God by grace forgives a sinner all of his sins, but only if he repents. Sadly, many today who profess to be Protestant Christians teach that God forgives people without repentance. Some even teach that repentance is a hindrance to forgiveness. If the Scriptures teach anything clearly, it is that God forgives only them that repent of their sins.

God has revealed His moral law to men, and He demands that they follow it. His law, Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, "is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." (Romans 7:12) Men, however, are not. They are unholy, and unrighteous, and evil. They do not follow God's law, but rebel against it. So, they incur God's wrath, and they perish in their sins unless He forgives them. No man can stand righteous before God on his merits, because he has none; he has only sins. He can only stand righteous before God if his sins are forgiven. King David wrote in the Psalms, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” (Psalm 32:1, 2)

Repentance is a condition of forgiveness. Sin offends God, and He will forgive no man who is not sorry for the offense. King David wrote in the Psalms, “God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready.” (Psalm 7:11, 12) So, John the Baptist preached “the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” (Luke 3:3) After Jesus rose from the dead, He gave his disciples a summary of the teaching of Scripture, saying, “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:46, 47)

Repentance is not merely a change of mind, as some have taught; it is much more than that. In repentance, the sinner reconsiders what he has done, and he acknowledges that what he has done is a sin. He regrets what he has done, and he makes up his mind never to do it again. When the construction of the first temple in Jerusalem was completed, Solomon offered a prayer on behalf of the people in which he prayed:

If they sin against thee, (for there is no man which sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them over before their enemies, and they carry them away captives unto a land far off or near; Yet if they bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive, and turn and pray unto thee in the land of their captivity, saying, We have sinned, we have done amiss, and have dealt wickedly; If they return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, whither they have carried them captives, and pray toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, and toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for thy name: Then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling place, their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee. (2 Chronicles 6:37-39)

Repentance has three elements. In the intellectual element, the sinner acknowledges that he has sinned against God, and that his sin deserves punishment. So, Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, “By the law is the knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:20) In the emotional element, the sinner moves from the pleasure of sin to sorrow for it. So Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.” (2 Corinthians 7:10) If repentance has the mental element, but not the emotional, then it is merely fear of punishment. In the volitional element, the sinner turns away from sin, and determines never to sin again. If repentance has the emotional element, but not the volitional element, then it is not a godly sorrow, but a worldly one. So, Judas, who betrayed Christ, afterward hanged himself because his repentance was not true. (Matthew 27:3)

There is always for the people of God the temptation to make repentance superficial, to make it formal. They must resist this temptation, and they must humble themselves before God and be contrite. According to Noah Webster, *contrite* means “Literally, worn or bruised. Hence, broken-hearted for sin; deeply affected with grief and sorrow for having offended God.” So King David wrote in the Psalms, “The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.” (Psalm 34:18) After he sinned with Bathsheba, he wrote, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.” (Psalm 51:17) Through Isaiah the prophet, God told His sinful people, Judah, “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him

also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” (Isaiah 57:15)

There was a tendency for God’s people, Israel, assure themselves that they were acceptable to God because they were Israelites, descendents of Abraham. When John the Baptist was baptizing, the Jews came to him to be baptized, but John recognized that for them it was a mere formality, and he said to them:

O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. (Luke 3:7-9)

When they asked him what they should do, he told them in practical terms to see to people’s needs. He said, “He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.” When tax collectors asked him what they should do, he told them to be just and honest. He said, “Exact no more than that which is appointed you.” When soldiers asked him what they should do, he told them, too, to be just and honest. He told them not to extort money from people, or to accuse them falsely, and to be content with their pay. He said, “Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.” (Luke 3:10-14)

The Jews came to regard themselves as righteous before God by virtue of their descent from Abraham; however, a true son of Abraham is not a physical descendant, but a spiritual one. He is one who has the faith of Abraham, and who does the works of Abraham. God made a covenant with Abraham in which He promised, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” (Genesis 12:3) Some time later, God changed Abram’s name to Abraham, and said to him, “Behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.” (Genesis 17:4, 5) God would make Abraham the father, not of one nation, but of many. Saint Paul wrote to the Galatians:

Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.” (Galatians 3:6-9)

As circumcision was the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham, Jews justified themselves before God because they had received circumcision. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, in part, to correct this error. He taught them that true circumcision is of the heart, and a true Jew is one inwardly. (Romans 2:28, 29) He argued that Abraham was righteous before God by faith, before he received circumcision, so Abraham is the father, not of them that are circumcised, but of them that have faith. (Romans 4:9-12)

Abraham’s faith was not isolated from good works, however. He did good works just because he had faith which is to say, he obeyed God because he believed God. God promised Abraham that He would give him innumerable descendants, and Abraham believed God. God also told Abraham that his offspring would be

named through Isaac. So, when God commanded Abraham to offer his only-begotten son, Isaac, Abraham believed that if he sacrificed Isaac, God would raise him from the dead. (Hebrews 11:17-19) So, he obeyed God and would have sacrificed Isaac his son if God had not stopped him. (Genesis 22:10-12) Saint James explained, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?” (James 2:21, 22) When the Jews justified themselves to Jesus, saying that Abraham was their father, Jesus replied, “If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.” (John 8:39)

One who believes God, obeys God. One who believes God repents when he fails to obey God. He believes that God is, as He revealed Himself to Moses, just, and “will by no means clear the guilty,” and also that He is merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.” (Exodus 34:6, 7) So, the man of faith repents of his sins. A true son of Abraham believes God; a true son of Abraham obeys God; and a true son of Abraham repents when he fails to obey.

Jesus illustrated repentance with the parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector, which he told to them that trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and looked upon others with contempt. The Pharisees were, in certain respects, the strictest religious sect in Israel, and they did not approve of associating with sinners. Tax collectors were among the most despised in Israel. They collected tax, and often collected more than the state authorized them to do. Moreover, they were collaborators with the pagan state of Rome. When Jesus called Matthew to be his disciple, he was a tax collector, but he left that occupation, and followed Jesus. After Jesus called Matthew, he held a great feast at his home, and he invited Jesus, and His disciples, and a great many tax collectors. The Pharisees complained to Jesus, asking Him why He allowed His disciples to eat with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus answered them, saying, “They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Luke 5:31, 32) It was with this in mind that Jesus told His parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. A Pharisee and a tax collector went up to the temple to pray. The Pharisee proudly stood before God and justified himself, saying, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.” The tax collector, however, stood at a distance, and would not look up to heaven. He beat his chest, admitted his guilt, and pleaded with God to show him mercy, saying, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Jesus said that the tax collector, and not the Pharisee, went away right with God, and He stated this divine principle: “for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” The Pharisee was proud of himself, and contemptuous of others. He was not in the least penitent for his sins, but rather boasted of his religious acts. He compared himself, not to the law of God, but to a notorious sinner. The tax collector was humble before God. He repented of his sins, and asked God to be merciful to him. (Luke 18:9-14)

Not long after this, when Jesus was passing through Jericho, Zacchaeus, a chief of the tax collectors, and very rich, wished to see Jesus but he could not because the crowds were large, and he was not tall enough to see over them. So, he climbed a tree to get a better view. When Jesus saw Zacchaeus, he called him down, and asked to visit him in his home. Zacchaeus came down as Jesus asked, and joyfully took him to his home. The people complained, however, that Jesus was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.” At the house, Zacchaeus stood before Jesus and said, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.” Perhaps Zacchaeus was present at the feast at Matthew's home, and heard Jesus say to the Pharisees, “They that are whole need not a physician; but

they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Zacchaeus believed in Jesus, and repented of his sins, and he made up his mind to make restitution for his sins, which is to say, he bore fruit in keeping with repentance. Jesus said to him, “This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:9) A true son of Abraham believes God; a true son of Abraham obeys God; and a true son of Abraham repents when he fails to obey.

Let us never stand before God on the basis of our own righteousness, for we have none of our own. Rather, let us always repent of our sins, and so receive God’s forgiveness. Let us put our faith in Jesus Christ, the one who has authority to forgive sin.

Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto His God and Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.