

**LIFELONG REPENTANCE**  
**(SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2016)**

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**Scripture Reading:** Psalm 32; James 5:13-20

**INTRODUCTION**

Last week we focused our attention on the doctrine of repentance.

Repentance is the gift of God where there is a true sorrow and hatred for sin and a sincere turning to God and embracing the mercy found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When you see the evidence in your life of true repentance, you know this is not just self-help or making beneficial improvements. Rather this is the grace of God.

Together saving faith and repentance are part of conversion.

And together faith and repentance continue to be the basis for living the Christian life.

Psalm 119, the greatest Psalm declaring the glory of God's Law Word, ends with a most profound confession.

**Psa. 119:176** I have gone astray like a lost sheep;  
Seek Your servant,  
For I do not forget Your commandments.

It is this combination of confession, helplessness in our own strength, and determination that by God's grace should also be your testimony.

**Because you have a merciful and sympathetic High Priest you are to live a life of faith, confession, and repentance.**

We will consider three related points on the doctrine of repentance.

1. The necessity and place of repentance
2. The necessity of specific repentance
3. The necessity of confession to others and the granting of forgiveness

**1. THE NECESSITY AND PLACE OF REPENTANCE**

Please turn to Hebrews 4:14-16.

**Heb. 4:14** Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. **15** For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are, yet* without sin. **16** Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

We are going to return to this passage again in this message, but let us begin by considering the significance of this passage in terms of the necessity and place of repentance.

What does this passage say about the relationship of salvation and repentance?

While this passage does not expound entirely the message of salvation in Jesus Christ, it does direct you to consider who your Savior is and His glory and what your response must be.

Your salvation clearly is not based on your own repentance and reformation of your life.

Your salvation is because you have a great High Priest who offered Himself as the sacrifice and sits now in glory and splendor.

But can it be possible that someone could truly experience God's free grace in Jesus Christ and then not look to Him as his Great High Priest?

No.

Is it possible for a sinner to be saved who then does not confess his sin before his High Priest and seek to turn from that sin as he comes boldly to the throne of grace?

Again, no.

Based on a number of passages we can say, repentance is not the cause or basis of your salvation, but it is absolutely necessary!

How does this not lead to salvation by works or trusting in something we have done?

The answer is the faithful proclamation of the gospel exalts the Lord Jesus Christ alone as the only basis for salvation while calling lost and ruined sinners to place their faith in Him and turn to him in true sorrow and repentance.

Let me share an analogy that I trust might be helpful.

Gasoline is not what makes a car. Fuel alone will not make your car go anywhere. And yet it can also be said, that without fuel, a fully functioning car will not go anywhere.

A. A. Hodge gives several reasons why repentance cannot be the basis for God's forgiveness.

- 1) God's justice demands the punishment of every sin. Your own repentance cannot satisfy the demands of justice.
- 2) The demands of justice could only be satisfied in the obedience and suffering of Christ. He alone has made perfect satisfaction.
- 3) Further Scripture shows repeatedly man by his works can never establish peace or his own justification.

Hodge also gives several reasons why repentance is necessary.

- 1) The giving of forgiveness to one who showed no confession or repentance would be to confirm a sinner in his sin and encourage others.
- 2) Repentance is a fruit of God's work of regeneration.
- 3) The work of Christ is to "save His people from their sins." He did this by paying the penalty of sin on the cross. He continues to save His people through the grace of conversion and sanctification.

Let us be very clear. Repentance is not the basis for peace and for pardon. Without repentance there is no assurance of peace or pardon.

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## **2. THE NECESSITY OF SPECIFIC REPENTANCE**

The WCF in chapter 15 section 5 states:

Men ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every man's duty to endeavor to repent of his particular sins, particularly.

The very precise language of the Confession sounds a bit strange 369 years later, but an important point is made.

There is a general duty that every believer should seek to turn from sin and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ.

But God also calls you to examine your life by His grace and seek to turn from specific sins you know you are guilty of committing.

Listen to Psalm 19:12-13.

12 Who can understand *his* errors?

Cleanse me from secret *faults*.

13 Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous *sins*;

Let them not have dominion over me.

Then I shall be blameless,

And I shall be innocent of great transgression.

There is no way to be aware of all your sins.

As you know there are sins of omission and commission.

We often focus on the sins of commission, but sins of omission are just as serious.

Who could keep track of every impure thought and failure to truly do everything to God's glory?

How many times do you do something good, but your motives are not pure or you act to impress others?

Could you keep count of every word spoken out of anger or bitterness?

Are you consistently aware of all the things you should be doing but fail to do as fathers, mothers, children, members of this church, etc.?

Truly the words of David in Psalm 40 are without exaggeration.

**Psa. 40:12** For innumerable evils have surrounded me;

My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up;

They are more than the hairs of my head;

Therefore my heart fails me.

This is an additional proof that your repentance could never be the basis for your peace and pardon.

However, God's Word in other places does direct you to consider sins that are brought to your attention and from which you are to confess and seek to turn from.

Hebrews 12:1 calls you to lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares you.

1 Cor. 11:28 gives the call for proper self-examination. This has to do with not making a mockery of a communion service.

Certainly an aspect of self-examination relates to specific sins from which we should seek to root out.

Galatians 6:4 issues a similar call.

**Gal. 6:4** But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

Self-examination is not a psychological technique where we seek to find out what is causing us to do some particular sin.

Self-examination is based on asking for God's direction so that we live honestly and humbly before Him.

**Psalm 139: 23** Search me, O God, and know my heart;

Try me, and know my anxieties;

**24** And see if *there is any* wicked way in me,

And lead me in the way everlasting.

Further proof that we should seek to repent of particular sins is the law that directs us in terms of proper restitution and the like.

When Zacchaeus was confronted with his sinfulness and with his Savior he stated:

**Luke 19:8** Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."

Because you have a merciful and faithful High Priest, seek that He would bring to your attention specific sins so that you may turn from them by His grace and mercy.

### **3. THE NECESSITY OF CONFESSION TO OTHERS AND THE GRANTING OF FORGIVENESS**

Last week, I discussed that the word repent in Hebrew comes from the verb *to turn* and in the Greek *to change one's mind*.

In the Latin Vulgate, the word repent is translated as *paenitentiam* which in English is the word penance as you find in English versions such as the Douay-Rheims Bible.

This is a serious translation problem which has a connection with Rome's view of penance.

Penance according to Rome is a sacrament. It is a sacrament which is the external profession of the internal state.

It involves contrition and then confession to a priest. The priest then is to prescribe some form of satisfaction. This leads to the granting of absolution, a judicial forgiveness that the priest has power to give.

Indeed this system according to Rome is the only way whereby pardon of sins committed after baptism can be secured.<sup>1</sup>

A. A. Hodge observes well that in terms of confession to an earthly priest, there is not a word said about confession to a priest in the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

The book of Hebrews which speaks about the old covenant priesthood and the priesthood of Christ mentions nothing about coming before an earthly priest to confess your sins.

It is not simply with man that we deal.

You need to constantly keep in mind that you are dealing with God.

It would be a grievous mistake to think, well, I can just say a quick prayer and be done with it.

Now, it is not that you make atonement for sin based on your own sorrow.

It is not that your tears wipe your sins from you.

Grace is not something that God gives to you as payment for your sorrow.

But grace should drive you to take your sin seriously before a holy God.

So how do we understand the passages that speak of confessing our sins to others?

The Bible does speak of confessing sin to another person when you have sinned against that person.

Additionally some sins are committed not just against an individual but against the church as a whole and so in those cases public confession of sin is also appropriate.

**Luke 17:3** Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. **4** And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, "I repent," you shall forgive him."

This passage also declares the corresponding duty of forgiving those who come to us seeking forgiveness.

The Lord's Prayer also sets for this duty.

**Matthew 6:12** And forgive us our debts,  
As we forgive our debtors.

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<sup>1</sup> A. A. Hodge, 214-215.

<sup>2</sup> A. A. Hodge, 218.

Another very interesting passage is one we read earlier from James 5.

**James 5:16** Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

It has been a number of years since we looked at this passage in Sunday School.

Certainly the first application of this passage is confessing to the person that you have directly sinned against.

However, John Calvin and other commentators have also stressed the importance of confession to other believers in asking them to specifically pray for us.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "Sin demands to have a man by himself."<sup>3</sup> Sin isolates us and cuts us off from the fellowship that we should have with God and with other believers.

Of course, there is a place for privacy. But as we grow as a local church and body, consider the place at times for confession in terms of sharing a struggle with sin with another mature believer for prayer, encouragement, and accountability.

R. Kent Hughes in his commentary on James shares the following points.

1. If the sin has been against a fellow Christian, it is to that person that we must make our confession.
2. If the sin is not against a person, and if it is such that we need to confess it and gain spiritual counsel and support, we should go to a mature Christian.
3. The confession should be concrete.
4. Confession is not a law, but a divinely given help. It is to be practiced as God directs.<sup>4</sup>

Consider the blessing again of James 5:16 as we seek to deal seriously with sin.

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

**Heb. 4:14** Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. **15** For we do not have a

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted by R. Kent Hughes, p. 265.

<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Commentary on James*, 266-267.

High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are, yet* without sin. **16** Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Because you have a merciful and sympathetic High Priest you are to live a life of faith, confession, and repentance.

**Prayer**

**Hymn: 415**

**Benediction – Hebrews 13:20-21**

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.