

Chapter 15

GOD'S REPENTANCE

We continue in the third chapter of the Book of Jonah verses 9-10, and we will look at the subject of "God's Repentance."

Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented (KJV - repented) from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it."

In the last lesson we looked at the expression of Nineveh's repentance. These expressions were manifested in three different ways. First, in a formal and ceremonial way by fasting and afflicting themselves in sackcloth and ashes. Second, in a very prayerful and verbal manner of crying unto God for mercy. Then thirdly, in a spiritual and moral change of their ethical conduct. We stated that in the gospel age, known as the New Covenant, that repentance will manifest itself first in prayer by calling on the name of the Lord. Secondly, in baptism which is the public ceremony associated with confessing our sins. Then thirdly, in good works which are the fruit of a changed moral nature. Therefore, if someone truly repents today, he will call upon the name of the Lord, be baptized confessing his sins, and will begin to show forth an ethical change in his moral conduct. This is what we look for in biblical repentance in the gospel age.

Today we will look at the intriguing question of God's repentance. In verse 10 we examine the subject first from God's evaluation of Nineveh's repentance. Was it genuine or not? God not only heard of their good works when they professed repentance, but He also saw the very thing which He required, and what He was looking for all along. He saw that the Ninevites turned from their sinning. They had begun to bring forth fruit unto repentance. We read, ***"Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way."*** If God had not seen that, all their praying and fasting with sackcloth and ashes would have been disregarded. God was well pleased with observing changed lives and changed attitudes toward one another in the lives of the Ninevites.

The questions have been raised as to whether the repentance of Nineveh was of a temporal or an eternal nature. In other words, whether these people were only converted to God for a temporal period of time and later apostatized and perished eternally, or whether they were truly converted to God, and will be among the believers in the eternal state. Bible commentators seem to be about equally divided on the question. My summation that I have come to believe is that they were truly converted. But before I give the reasons why, I will try to explain why other good Bible teachers believe that they were not truly converted to God. The first reason that is given is that Nineveh was later captured and

destroyed about 250 years later by an invading army. Some Bible teachers conclude from this that the former repentance was not really genuine. The second reason that is given is that there are biblical examples of reprobates who exhibited temporal periods of repentance and humility before God. One prime example found in the Bible is that of wicked King Ahab. In I Kings 21:25 we are told just how wicked the king was. **"But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord"** In verses 17 through 24, God sends Elijah to pronounce the most dreadful punishment upon Ahab for his sinful conduct. This judgment or punishment was to take the form of destroying the lives of all of Ahab's sons, thereby wiping out Ahab's family and bringing his lineage to an end. Yes, you may gulp but the God of the Bible kills people. Elijah said, "Ahab, God is going to take the lives of all of your sons, and you will not have a family tree left. Your name is coming to an end." When Ahab heard this, we read in verse 27 that he responded to the news with fear and trembling, **"So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning."** Does that not sound like the same response of the Ninevites? However, there is absolutely no evidence at all that Ahab experienced a vital change of heart. But rather, contrary evidence is given in chapter 2 that Ahab died in a state of eternal reprobation. So while Ahab's repentance was not accompanied by a renewal of nature and repentance unto eternal life, it was pleasing in the sight of God so far as it went. For we read in verse 29 that Ahab's temporal change of attitude and behavior toward God brought about a temporal change of God's attitude and behavior toward Ahab. Look at the words in verse 29: **"See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house."** Ahab's repentance and humility brought about a temporal delay of the judgment threatened upon his family all the remaining days of Ahab's temporal life. He then died under the curse of God and went out of this life to enter into state of eternal destruction. So it is thereby held by some that the repentance of Nineveh was temporal like that of Ahab and only postponed the judgment of God for 250 years when the city was later destroyed.

Now while these arguments for the temporal repentance of Nineveh are very sound, I reject them as they apply to the case of Nineveh. I do so for two reasons. First of all I believe that the repentance of Nineveh was genuine and produced eternal benefits. We need to consider that all the people who repented under Jonah's preaching would be dead by the time the city was destroyed 250 years later. The only ones living at that time would be the grandchildren, the great-grandchildren, and the immigrants who would have migrated into the city. God's grace does not run through natural birth, but through spiritual birth. Just because you know people who are genuinely saved, does not mean

that their children and grandchildren are going to be saved. Again, the differences between Baptist and Presbyterian doctrines enter in here. Grace does not run through a family line, but it runs through a spiritual line, and God gives spiritual birth to whomever He pleases. God may save a Jacob and bypass an Esau who were twins from the same womb.

Let us compare today's moral climate in our country with the moral climate that existed when our country was founded over 200 years ago. While it is highly probable that a higher portion of the people that existed at that time were not spiritually regenerate, yet nearly everyone professed to be Christian in the founding of our country. This resulted in the moral climate which framed our Constitution and the early laws of our society. These laws were decidedly pro-God and pro-Bible in principle. While some of the founding laws were flawed by misinterpretations of the Bible brought on by racial and cultural bias, they nevertheless attempted to express the moral values of God's word. However, who would dare say that today's moral climate of our country reflects the moral values of our founding fathers? Would anyone, who has read the writings of our founding fathers, believe that they would sanction by federal law the killing of the unborn in the mother's womb? It would have been unthinkable 200 years ago. America is not the same country it was 200 years ago. Are we then to conclude that God's work in people 200 years ago was not genuine because of the moral values which are now held by their descendants? I think not.

Also, remember that from what we can best determine, all the churches that were founded by the Apostles in the New Testament age, disappeared within 250 years. Where are the churches at Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica and the seven churches of Asia? These all disappeared within 250 years. Yet we believe that God's work in them was genuine, do we not? A local church is a temporal institution against which the forces of hell may overthrow. It may cease to exist, but the regenerate portion of that institution will prevail to represent the people of God in the church universal, against which the gates of hell shall never prevail. Only a regenerate person will persevere and prevail. So if the early churches disappeared, that is no evidence that God did not do a spiritual work of divine regeneration in the midst of many of the people that comprised those churches. I would be foolish in believing today that all people that comprise the membership of a local church are spiritually regenerate, and if a local church goes out of existence, that does not mean that God did not do a genuine work in that congregation. For these reasons, I reject the line of logic that Nineveh's repentance was just temporal because God did not destroy Nineveh at the time He threatened to do so, but did destroy it 250 years later.

The second reason, and the more important one, that Nineveh's repentance was genuine

and lasting, is because of a statement our Lord Jesus Christ made about Nineveh. In Luke 11:32, Jesus states, **"The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here."** By this, Jesus was saying that the Ninevite generation will arise in the resurrection day as righteous believers and condemn the unbelievers who refused to repent under the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. I do not believe that these people will rise as unbelievers and rebuke other unbelievers. By the words of our Lord, I believe that the people who repented under Jonah's ministry will be resurrected as righteous individuals and condemn the unbelieving individuals who have rejected the "greater Jonah" who had been manifested unto them - Jesus Christ himself.

Look again at the wonder of this repentance as God observes it. **"God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way."** We should stop and consider with amazement the magnitude of God's graciousness to the sinful city of Nineveh. This is perhaps the greatest revival in the history of mankind. By a revival, I mean people turning to God. What happened in Nineveh never occurred in the days of Noah or in the times of Abraham and the patriarchs. What happened in Nineveh never occurred under the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ while He was here on earth. What happened in Nineveh makes conversions on the day of Pentecost look small in comparison. A few thousand turned to God on the day of Pentecost, in Nineveh several hundreds of thousands turned to God. There has never been anything quite like it. An entire city turned to God. No one who has lived has ever seen that happen. The Apostle Paul never stayed in a city until everybody was converted. He just preached the word and went on to the next city. No one from Apostolic times down to the present day has ever lived to see such a moving of the Spirit of God as occurred in the great city of Nineveh long ago.

Now we will consider God's withdrawal or removal of His threatened judgment. Notice the passage states that God saw their works and withdrew His threat to destroy them. It is expressed in terminology that **"God relented (KJV "repented) from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them."** How is it that God, the unchangeable, perfect Being, repents? There are some problems that this passage presents. First, a question is raised in the reader's mind, whether God can really predict the future. Didn't He say **"forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown?"** That was a prophecy, and yet it was not destroyed. Can God truly predict the future? So sharp is the contrast between what God said was going to happen to the Ninevites and what actually took place, that many Bible readers have wondered whether or not God's divine words are always fulfilled. Even Jonah had suspected from the very start that because of God's gracious character, He would not carry out His threats against Nineveh (cf. Jonah 4:2). We will see in the next lesson, how Jonah said to God, "I knew it would be just like you, if I went over there and

preached, that you would save those people. And I do not want to see them saved, they are the enemies of Israel, and I just had a hunch, because you were a gracious God, that you might save those people and would withdraw your threat to destroy them." The text does seem to raise doubts about God's ability to predict the future. However, these doubts are contradicted by a clear powerful statement from scripture found in Acts 15:18.

"Known to God from eternity are all His works." Those questions, whether God knows the future, must be addressed with this passage. Known to God are all His works; what He has preordained from the beginning of the world. When *The Birmingham News* came out this morning, God did not learn anything new or become any smarter by reading the morning headlines in the newspaper. God knows the end from the beginning, because He is the one who ordained it all.

This text raises another question about whether the nature of God's moral character is immutable or unchangeable. If God repented of His threat to destroy Nineveh, did He experience a change in His basic nature? When a person, who is known for his basic honesty, is caught in a lie, we say that person is acting "out of character." Or we say, "It is just not like that person to do that." That is, he usually can be depended upon to tell the truth, but in this case, he did not tell the truth. Did God tell a lie when He said, **"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown"**? Again, the biblical record is very clear in addressing such a question. Malachi 3:6 says, **"For I am the Lord, I do not change."** Also read Numbers 23:19 **"God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"** The word of God says that God does not lie and change. It says that He absolutely cannot lie.

This text also raises another question about whether God's principles of moral conduct are consistent, or whether He is always changing the way He acts. One time He may act this way, and another time a different way, so that you never know which God with whom you are dealing. Do you know any people who are constantly changing? One day they may show up at work real happy and the next day real sad. You never know which person is going to show up. Is God like that, or can we learn from the scriptures that He is absolutely unchanging and can be depended upon?

The prophet Ezekiel was God's prophet to Israel when they were carried into Babylonian Captivity. The purpose of Ezekiel's ministry was to teach the people of Israel, who had been born in captivity, about the sins for which the whole nation had been sent into captivity. But the people in captivity, believing themselves to be righteous, cried out in defiance toward God. In the book of Ezekiel we read that they actually dared to charge God with moral incompetence for punishing them for the sins of their forefathers. In

Ezekiel 18:25, they charged that **"The way of the Lord is not fair."** They were saying, "You justly punished our sinning forefathers, but now you are punishing us, their righteous descendants. It is not fair that You have changed your ethical principles of conduct." Continuing in Ezekiel 18:25, God replies to their charge: **"Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair?"** He was saying, "You are committing the same sins that your forefathers committed which brought about their captivity. If you will repent of your sin and do right, I will be a Father to you, but if you turn from your righteous ways and turn into sin, I will be against you. That is the reason I am against you right now." It was Ezekiel's job was to keep the sins of the people before them.

The fourth question that our text has raised is whether God has truly ordained all things that come to pass by a sure eternal and unchangeable decree of predestination. In other words, does God change His mind? Is God changing His purpose? Is God changing His character? How does this affect the doctrine of predestination? It has been common for the opponents of predestination to use this text in Jonah 3:10 and others like it, to seek to disapprove the doctrine of God's sovereign predestination of all which comes to pass. They say that this text shows that God's purposes are not settled and certain, but they are flexible and contingent upon the free will of His moral creatures. However, to assert that meaning from this text, the opponents of predestination must ignore the clear and powerful word of God once again. Job states in Job 23:13-14: **"But He is unique, and who can make Him change? And whatever His soul desires, that He does. For He performs what is appointed for me, and many such things are with Him."** The Apostle Paul states in Ephesians 1:11: **"...being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will."** To attempt to maintain that Jonah 3:10 proves that predestination is not taught in the Bible, it flies right in the face of these two powerful texts of scripture along with many, many others.

When we examine the word, "repentance" from our concordance, we find there are passages in the Bible which assert in the strongest way that God cannot and will not ever repent. Here are some of these passages. Numbers 23:19, I Samuel 15:29, Romans 11:29, and there are many others. I counted approximately 13 passages which dogmatically assert that God cannot and does not repent. But the same Bible asserts in the clearest way that God can and has repented, and Jonah 3:10 is one of those. Others are Genesis 6:6, Exodus 32:14, Deuteronomy 32:26, and there are more, approximately 20 in number. What is the solution to this seeming contradiction? Here is the way that some have tried to explain it. The modern translations have tried to soften the issue of God's repentance by changing the word from repent to relent. They say that God "relented" of the evil, or of the judgment. The only problem is that it does not really

address the matter, because the Hebrew word for "repent" or "relent" is the same when used to describe both God and man. However, the modern translations usually ascribe to man the word, "repentance," and to God the word, "relenting," but the same Hebrew word ascribes repent and relent to both God and man. So we don't really solve anything by trying to soften the meaning by rewording it in a translation.

The second way people solve this problem of God's repenting is that they consider that majority rules. Since the God-repenting passages outnumber the God non-repenting passages, the majority wins. Others have tried to solve the problem with personal prejudices and bias. One group says, "I like the idea of God changing His mind. This allows me the satisfaction in knowing that my will ultimately controls God's will. I like that idea." Then another group may have another bias another way. They say, "I like the idea that God never changes His mind, because this allows me the satisfaction that I can go out and live like the devil." So, as some people would say, our religious biases are left to determine the issue.

There is another way that is held by sincere Bible teachers who hold to the authority of scripture. They use the principle of trying to throw the whole thing out the window of anthropomorphism. What does that big word mean? It is a theological term which means a description of God in human terms. There are passages in the Bible which say that God has hands, feet, eyes, and things that are humanistic in nature. That is an anthropomorphic expression. However, we know there are other scriptures which say that God is a spirit, and doesn't have a physical body. So it is held by many that a simple solution is just to say that God is talking in human language. This approach is well intended, in that it seeks to guard against assigning human imperfection to God. That is, that God is changing all the time. You and I change, do we not? Yes, we do, because we are fickle. We change all the time, so in an attempt to protect God from these seeming imperfections, a great host of Bible teachers have said that the statement of repentance in Jonah 3:9 is only an anthropomorphic expression. God does not really repent, it just seems like He does. Now it is important that we guard against ascribing imperfections to God. God is perfect and has no need for anything outside of Himself. He needs nothing to complete His happiness and well being. The weakness in the anthropomorphic teaching is that when it is pushed to the opposite extreme, it removes all emotions and feelings from God, and reduces the being of God to consist only of intellect and will. He is viewed as only an eternal will and brain, having no heart or emotions. Under this concept, God cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities. Invariably that teaching shows up in teachers who hold to an extreme view of anthropomorphic expressions in the Bible. I would ask that if I grieve, and the Bible says that God grieved, does that mean that God doesn't really grieve because He would be imperfect because I grieve? No. If we say as

the anthropomorphic teachers do when they say that you may grieve, but God never really grieves. He is perfect. I would ask you this. If those are strictly human ways of expressing God, what about God's mind and will? Do you have a brain and a will? Does not God have a brain and a will? Is that just an anthropomorphic expression? You get into all kinds of problems when you try to solve a text in Bible by just throwing it out the window of anthropomorphic expressions. This removes God's personality from Him and renders intelligent, friendly communication between Him and His people impossible. You cannot pray to a God who cannot be touched with the feelings of your infirmities. (Cf. Hebrews 4:15). Try praying to an eternal, infinite mind who is a frozen zombie.

This was the error of the philosopher Aristotle who lived in 384 to 322 B.C. It can be shown historically that the Christian cultures which embraced this Aristotelian view of an emotionless God, drifted from theism into deism into atheism. You can see some of this influence in the founding of our country. The major religion that replaced the theistic view of God in the New England states was Deism. Then the intellectual thinkers in the universities reasoned that if God is so far removed that we cannot talk to Him, then is there really a God at all? This is not just some theoretical highfalutin talk. This is very, very practical as to whether or not we believe that God is aware of what is going on, and can be touched within His creation.

Now, how do you propose to solve the problem, pastor? I propose it the same way that John Calvin and the majority of the reformers approached it. Long before the reformers, Moses solved the problem this way in Deuteronomy 29:29. He wrote **"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."** Notice, there is a distinction between the secret will of God's decreative purposes and His revealed will which comprises our moral duty. There are some things which we do not know about God and what He is doing. God has fore-ordained whatsoever has come to pass, but God does not tell you how it is going to come to pass. That is secret, that is His business. But that same God has revealed the principles for moral conduct within His predestinating decrees. Moses was taught that it is that will of God which we are to focus on, and not the secret decreative will of God. Too many people fall into the error of trying to limit their moral duty to God by imposing the secret will of God on that duty, and that is a grievous error. I could give examples of this, but I haven't time to do so. I would let you know that this distinction between the secret and decreative will of God is rejected by both hyper-Calvinist and Arminian teachers. Both groups are miles apart regarding their theology, but they both reject this distinction. Why? Because the hyper-Calvinist says that God is of one will. He does not have two wills. The Arminian says the same thing. Only the hyper-Calvinist says that it is the divine predestinating will of God which we go by. The Arminian says,

"no, it is the moral will of God that we go by." Then the Arminian concludes there is no predestination of God. Then the hyper-Calvinist says there is no responsibility on the part of man. So if I reject both of these groups' explanation of this passage, how do I explain it?

We are ready to address this issue. Look at Jonah 3:10. There are two senses in which the term "evil" is used in this verse. With reference to the evil of the Ninevites, it refers to their wickedness and their sinfulness. In reference to the evil of God, it refers to His threatened punishment upon the Ninevites. There is no evil or wickedness in God of which He must ever have to repent. Get it firmly established in your thinking that God has never sinned and done evil whereby He has to repent. That is what the passages are partly saying when they ascribe that God does not repent. He is not a man that He has to repent. A second consideration in the text is the meaning of the term "repent." It basically means a change of mind or a change of a course of action. God is a perfect being, possessing infinite wisdom and power, so whatever His decreed will is, it is unchangeable in that He never needs to change His mind. Nothing would ever arise which would necessitate God to change His mind, seeing that He knows the end from the beginning. In this sense, God need not ever repent. On the day of judgment, when God is ushering in eternity, He will be able to look back over the course of human history and the creation of the heaven and earth and never see one of His decreed purposes from the foundation of the world ever altered or changed. He never has to repent of what He ordains to come to pass, because He is perfect. It is in this aspect of His being as a sovereign King, that His will of purpose is the ultimate designer of whatsoever is ordained to come to pass.

But this text gives another consideration of God as a moral Judge over moral creatures. God's revelation is but a revelation of His basic nature which is very basic and simple. Here is a description of God's basic moral nature. He is a God who loves righteousness, and He is a God who hates wickedness. That is not profound. That is what His basic moral character has been revealed to us in the Bible. Again I say, He is a God who loves righteousness and hates wickedness. God is not only a sovereign king who foreordains all that comes to pass, but He is also a moral governor over a world of moral creatures comprised of angels and men. Flowing out of this unchanging moral character, God has established that He will relate to these creatures by an unchanging law or principle.

Now here is the principle. How does God relate to you as a moral creature? His attitude toward you will be based upon what your attitude is toward Him and his moral laws. Whatever our conduct is toward God, we can in turn expect the same conduct from God toward us. Whenever men change their conduct or their actions toward God, they can expect God to change His attitude and conduct toward them. King David revealed this

character of God who loves righteousness, hates wickedness, and never changes His being. God would have to deny Himself if He ever started condoning wickedness and despising righteousness. In Psalm 18:25-27 David says: **"With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful; with a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless; with the pure You will show Yourself pure; and with the devious (an old word meaning unyielding, ungovernable, stubborn) You will show Yourself shrewd. For You will save the humble people, but will bring down haughty looks."** If you get mad and become stubborn with God, He will respond in the same way to you. Whatever your attitude is toward God at this moment, be assured that is how God is viewing you in return as a moral creature under his moral government. This principle is simple and clear. However you look and act toward God, will determine how He looks and acts toward you as a moral creature.

Since God has established this principle, He will never repent and change this principle. This principle as it relates to Nineveh is given to us in the prophet Jeremiah, chapter 18, verses 6-10. **"O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?' says the Lord. 'Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.'"**

Now there is your classic example with Nineveh. "Nineveh, I am threatening you with judgment in forty days. I am going to destroy you." But there is always that "if" in God's threat. "If you repent and turn to Me, then I will remove the threat of punishment and I will be merciful toward those who are merciful, and I will be pure toward those who are pure." On one day Nineveh is a wicked, violent city in the eyes of God, and then after forty days they are all loving each other. It is not the same city. They have changed, therefore God bestows His favor on them. You see God acts according to the way that we act under His moral government. Do not allow the predestinating decrees of God to tear this out of your Bible. All that takes place in God's moral government, His dealings with you and me, is under the boundary of His eternal decrees of predestination, but we don't know what they are. But we do know that when God tells you (Jonah) to go to Nineveh, and you say you won't go, you can be absolutely sure that your God is against you. You had better repent. But if you do obey, He will be for you. Here is the unchanging moral character of God and the way He deals with the affairs of men.

You might summarize it like this. While God never changes His will in His eternal secret decree, yet flowing out of that will, He has willed to change His actions toward His moral creatures as they change in their actions toward Him. So that men may know what to expect out of God, He has revealed that He will never alter this principle.

Now let's read again Jonah 3:10: **"Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it."** God had threatened to destroy Nineveh because of the misbehavior of the Ninevites toward Him. The people repented, changed their behavior, and God changed His threat of destruction. He shows Himself upright to the upright and merciful toward the merciful. In the secret decreative will of God, He had purposed to achieve the repentance of Nineveh. Those were His people, and Nineveh will not perish. In His decree of election, God has a people in the city of Nineveh. However, in the revealed will of God's moral government He doesn't reveal that decree to the Ninevites. Instead as a moral governor, He threatens to destroy them for their ungodly behavior. But this threat achieved God's purpose, and Nineveh repented. Then God repented of his threat and acted favorably toward the Ninevites who were being favorable toward Him. Oh my people, when you first heard the gospel, did you not hear it as a threat because of your sin? Did God mean business when He told you to repent? What did you do? Did you repent? Is God still going to send you to hell? Did God lie? No, His purpose all the time was to bring fear into your heart through the threat of hell that He might bring you to faith in Christ in the gospel, so that He might turn from His wrath toward you, to mercy for you. There is certainly a place for preaching hellfire and damnation. God is absolutely sincere, and He means business to everyone who hears the gospel. If you are not a Christian, God is calling you to repent and believe the gospel. If you do not repent and believe the gospel in this life, you will go to hell after death. That is the simple teaching of the scripture. God is not going to save you without your repentance. He will bring you to repentance, for it is by grace you are saved through the instrumentality of faith and repentance. Repentance and faith are not saviors but they are the connecting link which God provides to connect you with the Savior, the One who does save. You will never get to glory without believing the gospel and repenting. That is God's message to the sinner. God's message to the unconverted person today is simply this: **"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."** (John 3:36)

You may be struggling with understanding that God's wrath was abiding on you and me even though we have proved to be elect in Christ. Until you are brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ, the wrath of God abides upon you whether you be elect or non-elect. To make your calling and election sure, you must come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,

and by doing so, it will manifest that you were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Now to the wayward Christian. If you are living in sin and hardening your heart against some aspect of God's will, what is God's attitude toward you? He is not happy with you, and He will correct and chastise His children. Jonah is the classic example of that. If you think, as a Christian, you can live in sin of whatever nature, and God will not change in His actions toward you to correct you, you are not reading your Bible correctly. He chastens those whom He loves. He must do so to keep you from being condemned with the world of unbelievers. (Cf. I Corinthians 11:32).

Then to those fearful Christians who struggle with lack of assurance, is there anything in this subject that will help you? Yes, because God has promised that whosoever will look to Him in the gospel of Christ, that He will look toward you in mercy. Why do you lack assurance today? Have you not trusted in Christ? You say, "yes pastor, I have, but I am just not sure what God is doing toward me." Do you not see from what we have expounded, that God has mercy for that person who looks to the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever your attitude is toward Christ and His gospel, that is how God will relate to you. Do you find yourself wanting to praise God? Then God will heap His favor on you. You are not going to get assurance by some "zap" from heaven apart from this word. The only way you will ever have assurance, is to believe what God says about Himself in His word. Jesus said, **"he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."** (John 5:24) Do you believe the gospel? Then God says "I will relate to you as a Father." John 10:27-30 - **"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one."** Do you love that gospel or do you hate it? If you love it, then God has a love toward you. His wrath has been lifted off of you and transferred to His Son. What more can He say, what more can He do? What do you want to hear? Do you want God to strike you with a lightening bolt? Do you want God to pull back the scroll of heaven and show you that your name is written there? Do you want to know if God is favorable toward you? What is your attitude toward His Son? If you are favorable toward the Lord Jesus Christ, I assure you by the authority of God's revealed character, He is favorable toward you. When the devil comes and says you can't be one of God's children by the way you live, and all the inconsistency in your life, just tell him that you want to be like your Savior, and the God in heaven will be pleased to grant assurance to you.

If the view you have of God is that no matter how much you love His Son, He might still be angry and wrathful toward you, you have been introduced to a warped view of God. God loves His people in His Son. The wrath is gone, so enjoy your Christian experience and live the life of Christ in you. Come to Christ. What does God say He will do? If you fear and tremble that you might not be saved, is there any way of overcoming that fear? What does God say? He will comfort and strengthen those who look to Him.

God repents, but not in His decrees. He never changes His mind or changes His character, but through God's sovereign grace in His decree toward you, you change your attitude toward Him, be assured His attitude and behavior changes toward you. Let us pray.

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