

God's Children Live in True Repentance

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Bible Text: Luke 5:27-39
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Let us now continue to the preaching of the gospel, and this afternoon I will preach to you the gospel as we have summarized and confessed it in Lord's Day 33 and we deal there with the repentance and conversion of men, and it is for this reason that we read the passage from the gospel of Luke. We go to chapter 5 of the book of Luke, and then we read the verses 27 to 39. Luke 5:27.

27 After these things He [that is, our Lord Jesus Christ] went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." 28 So he left all, rose up, and followed Him. 29 Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them. 30 And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" 31 Jesus answered and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." 33 Then they said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?" 34 And He said to them, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? 35 "But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days." 36 Then He spoke a parable to them: "No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old. 37 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. 38 But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. 39 And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better.'"

Let's then also read Lord's Day 33 on page 549 of your Book of Praise. Lord's Day 33.

88 Q. What is the true repentance or conversion of man?

A. It is the dying of the old nature and the coming to life of the new.

89 Q. What is the dying of the old nature?

A. It is to grieve his heart for sorrow that we have offended God by our sins, and more and more to hate it and flee from it.

90 Q. What is the coming to life of the new nature?

A. It is a heartfelt joy in God, through Christ, and a love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.

91 Q. But what are good works?

A. Only those which are done out of true faith, in accordance with the law of God and to his glory, and not those based on our own opinion or on the precepts of man.

In response to the gospel, we will sing as our alm song, Psalm 116, verses 5, 6 and 7.

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you want a job done right, you will try to find the right person to do it. If you need a chef, you have to find someone who knows how to make a souffle. If you have trouble with your car, the only person who can help is someone who knows which part is the carburetor. You need to have the right person for the job. As logical as it is, this approach is one that the Lord Jesus seems thoughtfully to have avoided. When it came time to choose his disciples, he did not go out and find 12 theologically trained, morally upright, spiritually disciplined men, instead, he gathered a diverse troupe of everyday sinners. They hardly seemed like the kind of men who would set the world on fire, but when they met the Lord Jesus, their lives were changed forever and they became courageous for Christ. And there is no better example of this transformation than the lowlife named Levi, who was later and better known as Matthew. As we read Levi's story, we see what happens when the Lord Jesus comes to save a sinner and urge us to attend the Lord's Supper. It is so easy for us to forget that we are sinners. Yes, justified, but still, in ourselves, weak and vulnerable.

We all stumble in many things, says the Apostle James. The radical, regenerating work of Christ sours when we lose sight of our continuing need, when we forget that in our daily walk we are frail and needy, and this is a real danger to the church. We have been gloriously saved. We are hardworking. We are spiritually and perhaps materially prosperous. Many of us have few physical needs, but are we seeing ourselves as we really are? Jesus' warning to the Laodicean church may apply to us. You say, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." The Lord's calling of Levi speaks to this very issue and teaches us, is what we confess in Lord's Day 33, that God's children, also as fruit of the celebration of the Lord's Supper, live in true repentance and in this way I must summarize what we, according to Scripture, confess in Lord's Day 33, God's children live in true repentance. We'll have a look what true repentance is, that will be the first aspect

we will see, and we'll have a look at how true repentance is shown, the second aspect we will see. God's children live in true repentance, what it is and how it is shown.

Brothers and sisters, as we read Levi's story, we see what happens when the Lord Jesus comes to save a sinner. The story starts with business as usual. The Lord was busy performing miracles and even forgiving people's sins and Luke tells us that he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax office, and with these words, we know almost everything we want to know about what kind of man Levi was. He was a tax collector. In other words, he was a thieving sinner. In those days, the Romans subcontracted the collection of their imperial takings, anyone who wanted to collect taxes would place a bid for his region and the Romans awarded the contract to the highest bidder. The winner paid off the government and then tried to levy as many taxes as he could; anything he collected over and above the amount he bid was his to keep. And it is not difficult to understand that this system was open to corruption; with all the poll taxes, land taxes, income taxes, road taxes, and port taxes they gathered, most collectors were very, yes, filthy rich. Filthy rich. And filthy would be the proper word for it.

Tax men were among the most despised men in Israel because they collaborated with Romans. They were considered traitors because they collected more than they had any right to take. They were considered robbers. And because they had so much contact with Gentiles, they were considered unclean. In actual fact, some rabbis said that if a tax collector set foot in someone's house, everything and everyone inside that house became impure. And Levi was among the lowest of the low, sinfully rich, and socially hated. When people saw this man sitting in his tax office and counting his money, they hated him.

It is rather good not to focus only on Levi, what we ought to see in Levi is our own sinful selves. We are like him in many ways. We sit in the tax office of our sin, trying to get as much as we can for ourselves and not caring too much what we have to do to other people to get it. We will keep sitting in our sins, going about our business, until the Lord Jesus interrupts us the way he interrupted Levi. Luke tells us that the Lord Jesus said to him, "Follow Me." So he left all, rose up, and followed Him. Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them." Levi's conversion teaches us never to despair of our own or anyone else's salvation. We should say, "If God can save someone like Levi, he can save anyone, even a sinner like me."

When he does save us, the Lord Jesus generally does it the way that he did it here. Although the story of Levi's salvation is told in just a few short lines, it contains in short the whole doctrine of our salvation and it is clear that we hear about God's sovereign choice to save us. Before Levi ever decided to follow God, the Lord Jesus decided to make him one of his followers. As the Lord later said to his disciples, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit." And when Jesus said this, Levi knew exactly what he was talking about because the Lord Jesus came to him before he ever came to Jesus. He was chosen by grace and the same thing is true of everyone who comes to God through faith in Jesus Christ. God's grace is

God's choice. We were chosen in Christ even before the foundation of the world, says Paul in Ephesians 1.

And you could say that there is a general call that Jesus sends out to everyone. It is the gospel call to turn away from sin and believe in Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, not everyone answers that call and it is for this reason that our Catechism also asks what is true repentance or conversion of man? For there is a lot of imitation and fake obedience to God. It is for exactly the same reason that the form of the Lord's Supper says that God will certainly receive in grace all who can answer the question of self-examination in a positive way, in faith, in our only Savior, Jesus Christ. And we may call that the effective call from God, by which God actually draws his chosen people to himself, and this was the call that Levi received. It is the call that effectively drew him to Christ. Up until this point in his life, Levi was a man greedy for dirty money, filled with an uncontrolled desire to possess, careless of justice in his eagerness to have what did not belong to him, yet he was snatched from the workshop of sin itself; he was saved when there was no hope for him, at the call of Christ, the Savior of us all. And remember, God issues the same call to every true believer. The Lord Jesus says, "Come," and by the working of the Holy Spirit, we choose to follow him. What we heard before the celebration of the Lord's Supper, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we are heartily sorrowful for our shortcomings and desire to fight against our unbelief and to live according to all the commandments of God. By Christ's Spirit, who dwells in Christ as the head and in us as his members, we have true communion with him and share in all his riches, life eternal, righteousness and glory. Our conversion and repentance comes only by the choice and calling of God. It is a gift of grace.

What is this true repentance or conversion of man? The Lord said to Levi, "Follow Me." And what happened? Levi "left all, rose up, and followed Him." And of course, this does not mean that Levi never again returned to set this affair straight but what Luke stresses is that Levi made a decisive break with his old life and followed Jesus. Literally, Levi was following him in a progressive form of the verb, as a continuous pattern of life, and in doing this, Levi made a substantial sacrifice because he was wealthy; there were some quiet heroics here because unlike the fisherman that followed Jesus, he could not go back to his old job if things did not work out. And indeed, Levi did follow Jesus for the rest of his life for this Levi is none other than Matthew, the gospel writer. Whether he was named Matthew when the Lord Jesus first called him, we do not know. It is possible that just as Simon was named Peter the Rock by the Lord, so Levi was likewise tagged Matthew, gift of God. You could say it is almost divine poetry. The rip-off artist would become, as his name suggested, a gift of God to his people.

And this was utterly amazing. Why? Because of all the people in Capernaum, Levi was the most public, unacceptable candidate for discipleship. Jesus sought out a man no one else wanted, the one who some wished would come under God's most severe judgment. And this is one of the highlights of Jesus' ministry, and this is what Luke was working towards in his rendering of the gospel. First, Luke writes about the Lord Jesus' healing of the impossible disfigured leper, and in this the Lord demonstrated his power to heal the damages of sin. Then Luke mentioned Jesus' pronouncement to those gathered around the

paralytic that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins. And now this. The Lord Jesus shows what we can become through faith in Jesus Christ. For this is what repentance requires and this is what you promised when you ate of the bread and drank of the cup in faith, we must let go of everything that stands in the way of going with the Lord Jesus. It is a definite break with the old life of sin, no matter what the cost. With the word of the Catechism, that we grieve with heartfelt sorrow that we have offended God by our sin, and more and more to hate it and flee from it, and when we look at the other side of the same coin of true repentance, it is a heartfelt joy in God, through Christ, and a love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.

Christ saw it in the disfigured life of Levi, the tax collector, and Matthew, the gift of God. He sees us, sinners, with all our moral deformities through his divine eyes, for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. No matter how scarred and ugly a sinner's life may be, Christ will make it into something beautiful for God. And we saw it with our own eyes at the Holy Supper table. He has devoted his life to it and this brings us to the second aspect, how true repentance is shown. It is as if Levi shared with us the bread and the wine in remembrance of Christ's work for our salvation. His prayer of thanksgiving would have been exactly the same as ours, "We praise You, merciful God and Father, that Your gift is a privilege to rejoice in the communion of Your Son, as well as in the fellowship with one another. We also beseech You that we, being strengthened in faith by the celebration of this sacrament, may bring forth fruits of thankfulness."

For what did Levi do? He hosts his own goodbye party. "Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house, and there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them." Levi had the means to do it big, and he did. A large crowd would have required extra servants and a significant amount of money, but that was fine with Levi. Levi hosted the feast, not for selfish reasons, but a celebration of what had happened to him, and as Solomon already mentioned, feasting is for laughter and merriment. The ex-tax collector regarded the change in his life as an occasion for rejoicing, as indeed it was. Nothing is a greater occasion for joy than conversion. As J. C. Ryle once wrote, "Nothing can happen to a man which ought to be such an occasion of joy as his conversion." It is far more important even than being married, of coming of age, or being made a nobleman, or receiving a great fortune. It is the birth of an immortal soul! It is the rescue of a sinner from hell! It is a passage from death to life! It is being made a king and priest forever! It is being provided for, both in time and eternity! It is adoption into the noblest and richest of all families, the family of God!"

Coming to know Christ is a great reason to party. Levi also put on the banquet for the Lord Jesus, for the Savior was the guest of honor. Without him there would have been no celebration. The desire to honor God is a natural reflex of the soul that has received the divine touch. The Lord Jesus was everything to Levi and this always goes together in true thankfulness to the Lord.

The retired tax collector hosted a feast for his friends. The soul that has received God's grace does not want to go to heaven alone. This is the way it was also with the other disciple of the Lord, Andrew. The first thing Andrew did was to find his own brother

Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah." And remember too, the Samaritan woman's invitation, "Come, see the man who taught me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" Levi knew that if his needy friends would meet the Lord Jesus and hear his word, they would be moved and perhaps follow him.

Levi's changed heart longed for this and it is clear the Pharisees and the teachers of the law did not share Levi's joy. They were deadly serious about their lifestyle. Their legalistic mindset had no room for parties like the one Levi organized for the Lord Jesus. Further, they accused the Lord of eating and drinking with the wrong crowd. They had a problem with Jesus and his guest list, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" In their view, Jesus eating with them indicated friendship and full acceptance and it never occurred to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law that their lack of concern for sinners and their haughty mercilessness had distanced them from God. These experts had the Scriptures, but they had failed to truly read them and they were not willing to show their thankfulness according to God's words.

Remember, when the prophet Micah stated the Lord's case against Israel in the sixth chapter of his prophecy, he concluded by asking, "And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" From Micah's perspective, the Pharisees' lack of concern for others indicated that they did not understand the heart of Jesus. And the parallel account of Levi's calling in Matthew 9:13 records an extra line from the Lord Jesus, "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'" And this is a reference to Hosea 6:6, where Hosea, like Micah, condemns Israel for its attention to ceremony without caring for others, and it is clear that Hosea's words were immensely important to Jesus. They lay at the heart of his mission. He had come to call those who knew they were sinners, not those who thought they were righteous, for superficial religious observance of rites and rituals without love and mercy for needy sinners means nothing.

The Pharisees had all civilities, their conversation was a collage of Scripture and pious suggestions. They never swore. They kept their homes in order. They regularly attended synagogue. At first glance, they were good people with all their good works. They had no apparent needs. They were righteous in their own eyes. And don't forget, a Pharisee is not someone we find outside the church, but inside. These men were committed to God. They knew their theology, but they did not share God's heart for ministry. They did not have the love of Jesus for lost and needy sinners. They did not act in faith according to the law of God and to his glory. Their service of God was based on their own opinion and on their own precepts and there is the danger that more than a little of the spirit of the Pharisees is in us. We too can become a club, an elite society that has all the right externals, but has forgotten to show mercy to the lost. How did you come from the Holy Supper table? We must never ever forget that we are sinners, and that each one of us honestly says, "I am the worst." We dare not forget that people without Christ are lost sinners, without hope and without God in the world, dead in their transgressions and sins. We must keep preaching the gospel to a lost world, inviting sinners to come to Christ and into the church. Following Christ requires getting our hands dirty, believing Jesus' words, "Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick. I have not come

to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." And he did not come to call self-righteous people like the Pharisees who want to serve God according to their own fancy, and this is what we have seen today with our own eyes. Christ has given us his righteousness and therefore true repentance means that we should serve him according to his will and let this be your prayer, that our merciful God and Father will cause you to show in your whole life your heartfelt love towards him and towards each other. Amen.