

Lifestyle Repentance

2 Corinthians 7:10-11

When was the last time you turned on your television set to hear a preacher of the gospel thundering forth the message of repentance? Pulpits and preachers are strangely silent today regarding the message of repentance.

And yet, repentance is not an ugly word, but it is a positive evaluation that I make so that I can gain God's plan for my life. Many people have misconceptions of what repentance is. There are three principles of repentance that I want to discuss here. The first two is are a comparison between worldly repentance and true godly repentance and the third is how repentance applies to our lifestyle so that we walk in hope and the joy of knowing God on a personal intimate level.

Worldly repentance is basically nothing more than remorse. Worldly repentance is somewhat destructive because it is simply being sorry for one's actions. This kind of repentance is seen in Matthew 27:1-5, "When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor. Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned by betraying innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? You see to it! Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself."

The product of worldly repentance is not a changed life, but defeat and destruction. Worldly repentance is not a change of heart, but remorse, regret and the burden of one's guilt. The world can only see this as the meaning of repentance. That is why you ever so often hear

some lost person say things like, “I don’t like church because all they do is make you feel guilty.” But the truth of the matter is that Christian I know that is living their faith has a valid self-image and lives joyfully because of the freedom God has given them.

Where does this perception come from? In our modern culture, it comes from counterfeits of the faith. There are countless religions that base salvation on penance, deeds, and rules. God is not impressed with our religious efforts. In fact, this grieves God. A relationship with Christ produces godliness, holiness and good works. Good works, penance, godliness and an effort to be holy will never produce a relationship with God. The relationship must come first. Only God can produce these good things in our lives, we cannot. We subject ourselves to God’s commands out of a love for God and a desire to grow close to Him. We value our relationship with God more than the pleasures of this life and we have the faith that God can keep His promise that “Those who trust under the shadow of His wings will be abundantly satisfied with the fullness of His house and He will give us to drink from the river of His pleasures.” **What am I missing by turning from temptation?** I stand to lose much more by turning from His promises.

Another source of this worldly repentance is a rejection of grace and the need we feel to bear the penalty for our own wrongs. Judas was such a man. He saw that his actions had given the religious leaders the opportunity to condemn Jesus to die on the cross. Judas’ motivation all along was his own self-interest. He followed Jesus as long as he thought he was to rule along side Jesus when He set up His kingdom. But when Jesus started talking about the world to come and a heavenly kingdom, Judas’ visions of greed and prosperity began to melt. He sold Jesus into the hands of His enemies for 30 pieces of silver. His exact motivation is not entirely clear. Either he decided to abandon Jesus and get a profit on the way out or he intended to force Jesus’ hand. Perhaps he thought that if Jesus were attacked, he would be forced to stand and fight and establish His kingdom now. Judas never knew that he was fulfilling God’s plan while sinning

against the Lord. Whatever the reasoning was, we do know Judas' motivation was greed. **He was a thief from the beginning and in the end; the silver he coveted failed him.** It was so worthless that he threw it on the ground. I don't think that Judas expected Jesus to be condemned to die because when he saw that He was condemned, he tried to fix the problem by pleading with the priests. When he saw the consequences of his actions, he was very remorseful and had worldly repentance.

Worldly repentance is nothing but remorse and regret for the consequences of our action. It has no redeeming qualities; it only puts us under the burden of our guilt. Judas repented of his actions, but he did not turn to God for forgiveness. **He tried to remove his guilt by arguing with the priest.** They didn't care that he betrayed innocent blood and said so. He then tried to ease his conscience by casting the money into the temple. **Undoing a wrong is like trying to unscramble an egg.** Giving the money back did not erase the burden or undo the consequences. Because of the weight of his guilt, Judas hanged himself as though that would offer restitution. **It does not.** In death, Judas was just as guilty as in this life, only now he had no opportunity to be redeemed. Worldly repentance does not turn us toward God, but instead it drives us away from God. **We feel unworthy of God's mercy because we are not looking at God or His word; we are looking at our actions and our guilt.** Guilt can never bring us to true repentance. Only the light of God's word can produce true repentance.

On the other hand, true repentance or godly repentance comes from the Greek word that means to change one's mind and purpose – to turn around and go in a different direction. A good example of this can be found in 2 Corinthians 7:10, "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what

zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.”

Another good example of godly sorrow leading to true repentance is found in Psalm 51:1-4, when Nathan the prophet went to David after he had sinned with Bathsheba. Listen to David's prayerful response, “Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your loving kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight - That You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.”

Many make claims that the Bible makes them feel guilty. But that is because they are looking at their guilt and rejecting the Bible. Godly sorrow leads to repentance and a clean, forgiven and purified heart. When I am bearing the burden of my guilt and my focus is on myself, I will crumble under the weight. The only hope I have is to try to forget my burden. The only way we can forget this burden is to run from anything that reminds me of it and try to drown out its memory with things, pleasures and activities. Each time something new becomes the norm, people have to find something new to entertain them. If someone without Christ allows himself or herself to rest and be silent, the guilt catches up again. Once our guilt becomes overwhelming, depression and despair take over.

Godly sorrow is just the opposite. This type of repentance is only found in the revelation of God's word. When I look at the holiness of God and see myself compared to Him, I clearly see that I fall short. But I also see that God has bridged the gap for me. Mercy and restoration is always God's first choice. Godly sorrow reveals God's desire to forgive and heal. Worldly sorrow is when someone sees their sins and chooses to bear the penalty on their own account.

True repentance is when I see my sins and failures and I lay them down in exchange for God's forgiveness, holiness and righteousness. True repentance is when I compare my path, the direction that I am going, to the path God has created for me to walk in and choose to change over. I leave my ways to follow His ways. Here is Jesus' example of godly repentance, as seen in Matthew 13:44-46, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

That is what we must do to find God's perfect plan. Like the man in the field, when we see God's purpose for our lives, we will evaluate it. We will either reject it and say our way is better and only what pertains to this life counts, or we will see God's plan and the eternal value of it. **Once we see the value of God's will, we will count everything we have as worthless compared to God and His purpose.** It will be a bargain to lay aside everything we have in exchange for Him. Without this kind of repentance, you will never understand the Christian life and you will never choose God's will over your current path. **Godly repentance is not merely sorrow over what you have done in your life, but the joy of what God offers in exchange for your life.** God has created a new life and a complete plan for every person who ever lived. One day we will all look back and see the perfection of God's plan. **Those who chose it will rejoice but those who chose their own ways will regret it.** That is the amazing love of God. Even though God knows that very few of us will ever follow His plan, He still predestined us to inherit all of His blessings. **But He does not force us into His purpose.** That is a choice that each of us must make for ourselves.

Godly repentance, then, is a lifestyle. Repentance is not a single act, but a lifestyle choice. It is a continuous evaluation that I make as I compare my life to God's word and seek to conform to the image of

Christ. As I see areas that are drawing my focus away from God's plan, I reset my focus on Christ and align my life with His will. It doesn't mean that I beat myself over the head and live in misery, but instead I choose to keep myself aligned to His godly path by focusing on Jesus Christ. **He is the author and finisher of our faith. Jesus is the only way to be justified and forgiven so that we can have a vibrant relationship with God and He is also the finisher of our faith.** He is the goal we aim for and the One who equips us to live the Christian life that is beyond our own abilities. **Godly repentance is to recognize that God's plan is good and my path has no lasting benefit. It also means that I must abide in Christ.** Look at John 15:1-10, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."

It is beyond your ability to produce godly fruit. Godly fruit is the good works that glorify God and those people we impact that will grow and begin to glorify God and produce fruit as well. **Many people run back and forth trying to find God's will and find their purpose. Many Christians produce meaningless good works that God doesn't acknowledge just because they feel they should be doing something.** To find God's will is a profoundly simple task. Abide in Christ. **Two key verses I want to draw attention to is verse 5,**

“He who abides in me and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” And verse 7, “If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask what you desire and it shall be done...by this My Father is glorified.” **To abide is to have a consistent relationship centered on Christ. Christianity is a two-way relationship.** He abides in us from the moment we surrender our hearts and lives to Him. We open the door of our heart, invite Him in and make Him Savior and Lord. **That is only half the picture.** Many Christians live defeated lives because they think this is where the relationship ends. **Inviting Christ into our heart is the beginning.** **This is the moment we walk through the door and become a citizen of heaven and a child of God.** No relationship is vibrant unless it is growing. He always remains in us; it is we who must make the effort to abide in Him. **The Bible makes it clear; the key to abiding is His word.** If His word abides in us, we have the open door. If we have that abiding relationship, our desires will be right and God will bless those desires. **If my desires take me away from God, they will not be granted because I must abide.** God already has the plan. I must let God lead me to where He is blessing; He will not alter His plan to bless what I am doing if it is outside of His will. If my purpose is to abide and glorify God, my desires will be centered around that and I will ask with the promise that God will do it – so that God is glorified.

A lifestyle of repentance is the most valuable aspect of the Christian life. If I am not evaluating my position compared to God’s word, I have no way of knowing that I am drifting away. A slight change of focus will eventually set you far off course unless there is something in your life that provides correction. **That is why the Bible tells us to renew our minds daily.** The farther off course we get, the harder it is to make changes and the easier it is to get discouraged. Repentance is a joy. **Nothing is sweeter than positioning my life in line with God’s plan and keeping it there.** It is the resistance to repentance that causes dread and worldly repentance that burdens us with guilt. Godly repentance gives freedom, satisfaction and fulfillment.

