

The Journey of Repentance

Repentance is a profound and transformative journey that culminates in a new way of living. It is both a personal and communal process that involves recognizing our own contributions to wrongdoing and seeking spiritual renewal. We will explore the essential elements of repentance, drawing on biblical examples and doctrinal insights to illustrate how repentance leads to salvation and a life committed to contributing to the salvation of others.

Understanding Repentance

Awareness: Repentance begins with awareness - the recognition that we are all co-contributors to the influence of evil. This concept is rooted in the story of Adam and Eve, whose choices introduced sin into the world. This awareness is crucial because it forces us to confront our own roles in perpetuating moral failings and evil. The discipline of self-reflection and contemplation, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, will enable us to become aware of our sin.

Penitence (i.e. remorse/regret) is a God-given barometer that helps us gauge our spiritual state. These are not merely emotional responses but indicators that we have strayed from God's will. The question is whether we choose to bury, ignore, or deflect these feelings, or whether we use them as a call to return to



God. We must also guard against becoming overwhelmed with remorse: “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:8-11). When, burdened by guilt, we begin to hate ourselves and turn away from God, this is the sorrow of the world. Rather, godly sorrow leads us to loathe our sin, and in so doing, turn to God knowing He loves us and, in His grace and forgiveness, will help us begin again.

Returning to God: The Bible shows us that the process of repentance involves returning to God through **confession**, as exemplified in the lives of David and Jonah. David's penitence is captured in Psalm 51, where he acknowledges his sin and pleads for God's mercy: “Against You, You only have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight...” (Psalm 51:4). While David's sin affected many around him, he realized that his first sin was against God in rebelling against God's will and thinking that he knew what was

best for his life. Jonah's story demonstrates a turning back to God through his confessional prayer from the belly of the fish: "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; and my prayer went up to You" (Jonah 2:7). These examples show that repentance involves acknowledging one's sins, feeling sorry for what we have done, and turning to God in prayers of confession to ask for His forgiveness.

Conversion (resolution to change) is a critical aspect of repentance. It involves a complete transformation of mentality, moving from old patterns of behavior to a new way of life. The Apostle Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 5:7—"Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump"—symbolizes the need to rid ourselves of old, sinful behaviors, often referred to as the "old Adam." David also realized the need for radical change, asking God to "create in me a clean heart... and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). He could not stay as he was. We have the love and life of God in us through the gift of the Holy Spirit, which empowers us to overcome and begin the difficult work of **restoring and repairing relationships**. As the last step of the process of repentance, once we have confessed our sin to God, we must also reconcile with those we have hurt, or those who have hurt us. Repairing our relationships, and seeking and granting forgiveness helps us transform further into the image of Jesus Christ.



Salvation and Repentance

Salvation, as offered by Jesus Christ, is fundamentally a spiritual gift from God – "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (see Ephesians 2:4-9). It is not something we can earn, but requires a sustained effort to live in a manner worthy of this grace (Philippians 2:12). Repentance is an essential component of this effort. Jesus' call to "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17) underscores the urgency of our spiritual work.

God's salvific activity aims to enable humanity to live in fellowship with Him and one another, in the new creation. Those who have been reborn through water and Spirit are called to contribute to this longed-for future by killing the old Adam, growing



into the image of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:45), and sharing the gospel in the kingdom of peace. It is in this way that we can “look for and hasten” the ultimate deliverance of humanity (2 Peter 3:11-13).

Practical Implications

Preaching repentance involves demonstrating the transformative power of repentance in our own lives. By embodying repentance, we show that we are both part of the problem and part of the solution. This is evident in all areas of life, including marriage, family, community, and society. Repentance is not only about individual change but also about collective contribution to the salvation of others.

Once changed, we are sent out to share our experience of repentance and God’s grace with others. David, after his personal journey of repentance, vows to teach others God’s will and lead them to conversion (Psalm 51:13-15). Similarly, Peter’s role after his denial is to strengthen his brothers – “But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:32).

The process of repentance is facilitated through prayer, absolution, and Holy Communion. In prayer we turn to God for His guidance and forgiveness. Further than our personal prayers of confession, each week we communally ask God to

“Forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors.” The absolution assures us of God’s forgiveness, affirming that despite our sinfulness, we are still loved and accepted. Through the peace of the Risen One we can make a new start. Holy Communion strengthens our resolve to imitate Christ’s life and make the sacrifices required by repentance.

Conclusion

Repentance is a journey that involves recognizing our contributions to evil, turning back to God, and undergoing a profound conversion. It requires a shift from old behaviors to new ones, aimed at living a life of grace and contributing to the salvation of others. Through repentance, we not only transform ourselves but also play a crucial role in the broader mission of salvation, working together to bring about the ultimate deliverance of humanity.

