

The Grace of Repentance

Romans 2:I-II

Does the title of this sermon sound like an oxymoron? For the Apostle Paul, it was the *kindness* of God that leads to repentance. Paul has already dealt with Gentile sinners in Romans 1:18-32, and in this section he takes up Jewish or religious sinners who judge others and are ignorant of God's kindness. Repentance is for everyone. It's a foundational doctrine, Jesus' first command at the beginning of his ministry, and the lifelong endeavor of the Christian (Heb. 6:1; Mk. 1:15; Matt. 4:17). Martin Luther's first thesis on the door of the church in Wittenberg said "When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said "Repent", He called for the entire life of believers to be one of penitence."

The Mechanics

Thomas Watson said "Repentance is a grace of God's Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed." We can see this in stages.

Conviction It begins with the opening of eyes, an acknowledgement and realization, as the prodigal "came to himself" (Lk. 15:17; cf Acts 26:18). It reflects a *change of mind*. Conviction comes many ways—Scripture, preaching, conversations, or conscience—but results in a person seeing their sin as God does and feeling sorrow and remorse. It is not mere knowledge of what one has done or failed to do, but a broken spirit and contrite heart (Ps. 51:17). Conviction includes not just what we do but what we are, not just our deeds but our motives.

Confession True conviction leads to confession. Confession is accurate and specific. It wasn't an affair, it was adultery. It wasn't borrowing, it was stealing. It wasn't saying things about someone, but gossip. Confession is naming the sin as God does, and then he is faithful and just to forgive us (1 Jn. 1:9). This should happen regularly (1 Jn. 1:7-10). To not do so makes for a parched existence (Ps. 32:3-4). First we confess to God, and then to the persons we sinned against (Ps. 51:4; Js. 5:16).

Change This is where you actually stop doing the thing you were doing. Repenting is a turning away, and we walk away from our past sins (Ez. 14:6). This is where we are *visibly reformed*. Sometimes we take a break from things which are good in themselves but can cause us to stumble. John the Baptizer warned the Pharisees and Sadducees to stop saying Abraham was their father and instead to "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matt. 3:8-10). Every child of God must repent of his *own* sins. This is not just turning *away* from sin, but turning *toward* God, "by patience in well-doing seek for glory, honor and immortality" (v7).

Restitution This is repentance in action. It summons us to put right as much as we can. Having been completely justified and forgiven for all our sins, we can freely give. John tells the repentant to share their clothes, the tax collectors to stop stealing and soldiers to stop extorting, threatening and to be content with their wages (Lk. 3:12-14). The Lord told Israel to return what was stolen and add 20% (Lev. 6:1-7). For live animals or means of production, it was up to 400% (Ex. 22:1). You don't gyp people for Jesus. Restitution includes restoring goods, seeking forgiveness, undoing harm, and is generally is as public as the sin was.

Repentance is a life-long endeavor and therefore a lifetime of God's kindness. It's being transformed into his image from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18).