

REPENTANCE SERIES

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page_id=3567

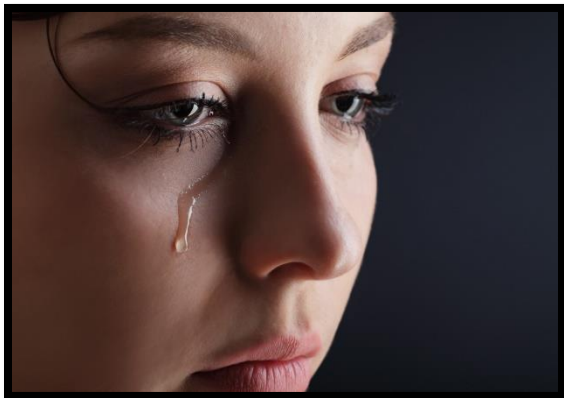
Last week we started off this series by talking about repentance, sin and the character of God. Repentance is the first word of the Gospel message and it has proven to be very difficult for humanity to understand and put into action. Sin is defined as any thought, word or deed that goes against the will of God as revealed by His Spirit and Word. When we sin, we become distant from God because He is pure light and there is no darkness in Him at all. Repentance is the mechanism that God has given us to be forgiven and have our relationship restored with Him. Since we are ambassadors and royal priests who have the gift of the Holy Spirit, then why are we not continually being forgiven and walking close with God every moment of every day?

PART 2: MYTHS, WHAT REPENTANCE IS NOT

1 Samuel 15:17-22

The problem of course is not with God. To those who truly repent He always forgives and cleanses from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). For many repentance is not the rending of one's heart and the returning to walk on the narrow path of righteousness but in nothing more than hollow platitudes, ways of saying "sorry" without having to give up practicing the sin! While God is willing to forgive as many times as one repents (Matthew 18:22), He certainly will not be fooled into washing as white as snow (Isaiah 1:18) any sin that remains cherished and worn like a badge of honor. The reason why holiness and closeness to God remain beyond our reach is because we have believed and practiced many worldly myths concerning how to repent. This sermon will explore seven of these myths: sorrow, preservation, penance, reform, self-deception, selective and no consequence.

1. SORROW IS NOT ENOUGH



Christians often think that being sorry automatically means one is repentant and forgiven. In the world we live in a few tears often have the power to wash away our wrongdoings. Who has not watched a sibling shed a few tears to win mom or dad over to their side of the story, especially when they were guilty? Who has not heard of a pretty girl not getting a ticket for speeding just because she told a heart wrenching story with a few tears? Who has not seen a student hand in an assignment two

weeks late tell a tearful story so that they might have their assignment accepted? When you watch events like these you almost want to scream out “don’t be fooled, he or she will repeat the bad behavior as soon as you are out of the room!”

The rich young man is one of the best examples in Scripture (Mark 10:17-27) of being sorry but not forgiven. One day a man ran up to Jesus, fell on his knees and asked “what must I

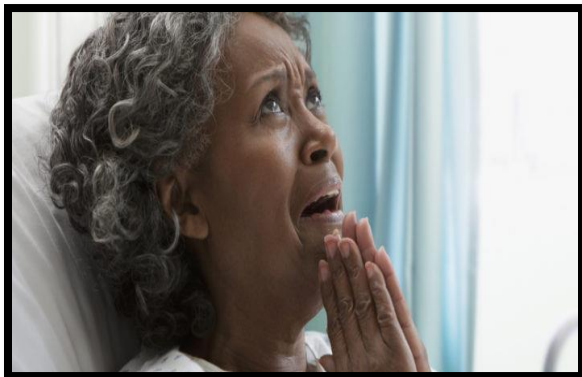


do to inherit eternal life (17)?” Jesus told him to follow His commands. The man replied “all these I have kept since I was a boy” (20). Even though he followed God’s commands the man knew in his heart that there was something keeping him from entering the kingdom. Jesus told him to “go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor.” Jesus said this because He knew the man’s sin was his love of money. At the end of the story we are told the man left with great sorrow because he could not give up his money. From this story, we learn that while sorrow is a very important first step in repentance, it is not enough to be forgiven.

Like the rich young man our repentance must go beyond being sorry for having sinned. We can tear up all we want but until we love God more than our sin, we will never ask nor have that sin forgiven.

2. SURVIVAL AND SELF-PRESERVATION

Fear and self-protection are not the right motivators to be forgiven. In the face of terminal illness or life threatening injuries people often try to bargain with God to be healed. They promise God “if You will heal me then I will repent and change my evil ways.” In other words,



save me and I will be the model Christian I am supposed to be! When God spares the person’s life of course they change for a few weeks but soon forget the grace they have received and return to their life of sin as soon as their fears have passed. Fear of God can be a powerful motivator but does not always lead to true repentance. For example, when the demons saw Jesus they trembled in fear for they knew He could destroy them (James 2:19). I am not saying that those facing death cannot be forgiven or born again. The thief on the cross

would testify otherwise (Luke 23:43)! What I am saying is that true repentance is not focused on receiving a reprieve from suffering and pain but instead on being forgiven for having offended

the very character of God! If there is to be any self-focused goal for repentance it must be to draw nearer to God so that He might draw nearer to you (James 4:8).

3. PENANCE

When people sin they often try to relieve their guilt by trying to pay for their sins. This is called “penance” and it is not just limited to those who view it as a sacrament for the idea of earning forgiveness and obtaining God’s favor has a very broad appeal.¹ When I was growing



up we had many wonderful Christmas’ together as a family but one in particular stands out to me. I grew up in a family of seven. My mom worked full time as a homemaker and part time as a seamstress. She was extremely busy during most days but even more so at Christmas. While we did not have much, mom always made sure Christmas was very special, after all it was Jesus’ birthday! The house had to be spotless and lots of sweets frozen in the deep freeze, ready to serve the company we were about to receive. My mom was always frantic this time of year but I remember one Christmas when the work became overwhelming. After having a bad day, she broke down and cried for

the work became way too much. Me and my siblings of course felt guilty and immediately pitched in and soon got her back on schedule. While we apologized profusely for being selfish and ignoring her work load, soon after this experience we went back to our old ways of messing up the house without having a second thought of how busy this made my mom!

When it comes to restoring our relationship with God repentance must go beyond me and my sibling’s worldly attempts to “make things right.” While going to church and praying more



often, singing more loudly or feeding the poor are good acts of service in and of themselves; they are not activities that can “purchase” God’s forgiveness. When we sin against a holy God who is pure light, Scripture states the only sacrifice that will appease God’s righteous wrath is death (Romans 6:23). Offering our righteous rags of service (Isaiah 64:6) as payment for sin is very offensive to God who demands so much more than we could ever pay! How much more offensive must it be to God’s only Son Jesus who paid

the debt for our sins, once and for all (1 Peter 3:18)? Penance cannot buy forgiveness but instead

¹ Richard Owen Roberts, *Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel*, Kindle location 1104.

is the “fruit and consequence of repentance through faith.” To be forgiven one must have faith that the blood of Christ was enough to forgive and cleanse one’s sins. If one is to offer God anything, one must offer a broken and contrite heart that truly believes that Christ’s sacrifice is the only means of being forgiven.

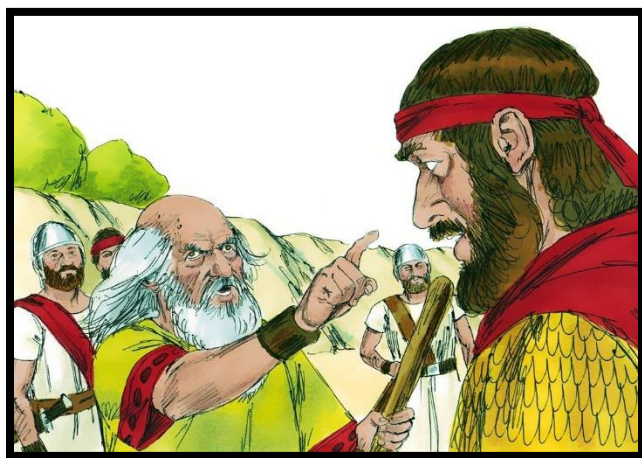
4. REFORMATION

Most people are capable of self-improvement and moral reformation. One does not need God to “sin differently.”² Self-help books are a billion-dollar industry that focuses on teaching people how to influence others, become better leaders, handle stress better, become rich and so



on. These books focus on the power of positive thinking. According to this world, you have the power to change your morality and skillset to accomplish absolutely anything! While following the advice of these books might lead to positive changes in a person’s life, repenting based on one’s own effort does not lead to forgiveness or lasting change. For example, the Pharisees’ attempts to do the right things to become holy did not lead to a closer relationship with God because their focus was on pleasing man rather than

God (Galatians 1:10). Appearing to be holy is not the same as being holy! Like the tax collector, these white washed tombs (Matthew 23:27) needed to cry out to God “have mercy on me for I am a sinner” (Luke 18:13). In a similar manner, true repentance and lasting change is a gift from God to everyone who offers a contrite and broken heart that asks for mercy!



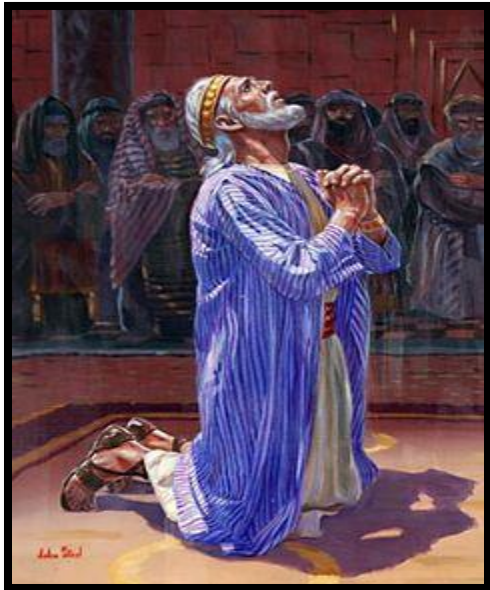
5. DECEPTION

Another myth that we often see today is the belief that one can repent and defend one’s sin at the same time.³ The best example of this duality can be found in the life of king Saul. For having waylaid the Israelite people when they came up from the land of Egypt, God commanded Saul to “put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys” of the Amalekites (1Samuel 15).

² Richard Owen Roberts, *Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel*, Kindle location 1126.

³ *Ibid.*, Kindle Location 1158.

God's command was clear: "totally destroy all that belongs to the Amalekites" (verse 3). While Saul initially obeyed God by attacking, and defeating the Amalekites, out of fear of losing favor with his men he then chose to spare King Agag's life as a trophy and the best of the cattle, fat calves and lambs (verse 9) as plunder. When the prophet Samuel questioned Saul on his sin he tried to justify it by saying that what he kept was to be sacrifice unto God (verse 21). Samuel then rebuked king Saul by saying: "does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (verse 22).



What we learn from king Saul's experience above is that God does not pardon unrepentant sin. One cannot go to God and expect to be forgiven when one refuses to stop cherishing that sin! Unlike Saul, king David had a completely different response when the prophet Nathan announced his sin with Bethsaida. David did not try to justify his sin by saying something like: but God she was beautiful, or lie and say but God she seduced me, or say but God it was consensual. Instead of blaming others or self-justifying his sin, David responded by simply saying "Lord I sinned against You (2 Samuel 12:13)." Unlike Saul, David was forgiven and is forever remembered as a man after "God's own heart (Acts 13:22)." True repentance focuses on how we have offended a holy God, not on self-justification so that we might swim in our own sin!

6. SELECTIVE

This is the myth that says that a person can selectively choose some sins to repent while cherishing other sins. In the book of James, we are told that the root of sin is the evil desires



within our own hearts (1:13-15). Often, we selectively repent of those sins that are the least enticing while hanging onto those that bring the most pleasure or we repent of those glaring sins that others see while relishing those sins that can be kept secret within our hearts. Repentance is not to be done the way that a person who goes into a grocery store and buys items based on the lowest cost for the greatest pleasure. All sin is offensive to God (James 2:10) and all sin cost the same, the life of our Lord Jesus

Christ (1 Peter 2:24)! While it is true that some sins are more offensive to God than others (Proverbs 6:16), God will not accept us cherishing any kind of sin. While society might approve

of wandering on that dark path, the truly repentant person finds all sin abhorrent, an offense that must be turned from as quickly as God's grace makes possible!⁴

7. NO CONSEQUENCES

The final myth concerning repentance is that once forgiven, all the consequences of having sinned cease.⁵ Often people will repent due to fear of the discipline of God. While fear of God



is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10) and therefore a good motivator for repentance, it can lead to relying on what called cheap grace. This is the kind of grace that believes one can always escapes God's discipline by repenting of one's sins. This of course is not true. While God prefers to be merciful to the truly repentant heart, He also knows when discipline is needed to keep one's heart on the narrow path of righteousness. Furthermore, focusing on the consequences of sin is not the right

motivation for only offering a broken, contrite heart for having sinned against a holy God will lead to repentance!

CONCLUSION

This sermon reviewed seven myths concerning repentance. First, while sorrow is a good first step in repenting it is not enough. Second, bargaining with God to spare one's life rarely leads to repentance. Third, anything one offers to God as payment for having sinned is like filthy rags to God. Fourth, outwardly changing one's life is not proof that one has repented and God has changed one's inward life. Fifth, one cannot repent and defend one's sin at the same time. Sixth, selectively choosing which sins to cherish is not real repentance. And lastly, avoiding the consequences of one's sin is the not the right motivator for being forgiven. Now that have a better understanding of what repentance is not, next week we are going to look at what is the right motivation of a truly repentant heart.

⁴ Richard Owen Roberts, *Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel*, Kindle location 1229.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Location 1233.