

# The Characteristic of Repentance

Luke 3:10-14

## 1. Introduction.

### a. Review.

i. Last time we were in Luke we saw John the Baptist begin his ministry as a preacher of repentance (3:1-9).

ii. This led us down a two-week excursion into the nature of genuine repentance.

1. The first week saw marks of false repentance.

2. The second week we explored two different kinds of repentance.

a. Repentance unto the forgiveness of sin.

b. Repentance unto sanctification.

c. We saw that repentance simply means to change one's mind.

i. Turning from sin, Satan, and self, to Christ and Him crucified (repentance unto the forgiveness of sin).

ii. Paul's "put on/put off" concept [Eph. 4:21-32] (repentance unto sanctification).

b. This morning we find ourselves back in the Gospel.

i. John is going to reveal a very important characteristic of genuine repentance.

ii. This is something distinctive of all true repentance, and something vital which must define true repentance.

## 2. The Text (10-14).

- a. We pick up the story in the middle of a scene, where John is preaching throughout the district surrounding the Jordan River (3).
  - i. The message he preaches is one of repentance.
  - ii. He's a prophet of God sent into the midst of an apostate nation.
    - 1. The nation is sick.
    - 2. The people of Israel have utterly rejected their God.
    - 3. They're a religious people who offer words of confession with their mouth, but their hearts are in rebellion.
    - 4. They're under Greco-Roman influence, and are completely defined by a love for lust, money, and self.
    - 5. There is a foundational rejection of God and His Law.
  - iii. It's in the midst of this situation in which John shows up as the Forerunner of God's Messiah. His job is to get the people ready for the entrance of their Messiah.
    - 1. As he preaches, he's baptizing. Remember, baptism was an outward symbol that you were aligning yourself with the identity and message of the one who's just baptized you.
    - 2. In response to their desire to be baptized for the forgiveness of sin, he brings a very strong indictment (7-9).
      - a. They weren't interested in true repentance, and turning to God from their heart.
      - b. Rather, they simply didn't want the wrath and judgment of God.
      - c. John essentially calls them out as false-repenters.
- b. Luke records John's interactions with three different groups of people, each of whom represent some aspect of the state of the nation.
  - i. They each ask the exact same question—what, then, will true repentance look like?

- ii. They're not asking what they must do to prove they're repentant. Rather, they're asking what will be the necessary result of true inward repentance.
- iii. The crowds (10-11).
  - 1. "Crowds" is a generic term for the faceless mass of humanity. Likely, it represents the average citizen of Israel.
  - 2. They crowds ask John what true repentance for them will look like, and he gives his response in v. 11.
    - a. Now notice that John doesn't tell them to sell everything. He who has two tunics is not to give way two, but one.
    - b. The same is true for food.
    - c. The idea, then, is that a person is to be generous, but from the abundance of what God has given them.
    - d. In short, when you see a person in genuine need, and you have the means to help them, you must help them. This is something very simple, and very straightforward.
- iv. Tax collectors (12-13).
  - 1. Background on tax-collectors. They were notoriously hated by the Jews—and for good reason.
  - 2. Upon asking what repentance looks like for tax-collectors, John responds that they must collect no more than what's been ordered for them to collect.
    - a. Notice, John doesn't say stop being a tax-collector (c.f., Rom. 13:1-7).
    - b. Rather, bring redemption to a corrupt trade.
    - c. In other words, a repentant tax-collector won't harm and extort people.
- v. Soldiers (14).
  - 1. Likewise, they ask John what repentance looks like for solders.

2. His response is similar—don't use your position for self-gain, but for good.
- vi. Now what's interesting, is Luke responds to all three of these groups with the exact same idea.
1. He doesn't call any of them to keep OT Law. He doesn't point any of them to something religious. He doesn't even want them to offer atonement or reparations.
  2. Rather, he speaks to something involving the character of a person.
  3. In other words, he reveals a singular definitive reality that truly accompanies any person who is genuinely repentant, regardless of their situation.
- c. Some comments on how to interpret this passage.
- i. This is in no way a call to social action.
  - ii. We must remember this entire thing sits in the context of repentance.
  - iii. As such, what John is doing is giving the marks of the people of God. Specifically, the marks of what will define the coming community of God (i.e., the Church).
    1. The coming community of the Christ will be, by its very definition, a repentant people.
    2. As a result, John is revealing what the defining characteristic of true repentance will be. In other words, it's a picture of that which will be the single distinctive of those who belong to Christ and His community.
  - iv. We must read the entire account of Luke's Gospel in the shadow of the coming cross. Structurally, this is how Luke sets up his Gospel.
    1. The entire narrative is on a single trajectory toward the cross.
    2. As a result, everything which precedes the cross event must be interpreted in the light of the cross event.

3. The result is that a good interpreter of Luke will read the account backwards.
  4. If you don't read Luke this way, then you will be left with many passages that make little sense.
    - a. You'll be left with a bunch of isolated events and stories that have nothing to do with the person and work of Jesus Christ... which is the entire point of the Gospel!
    - b. As a result, like many chose to do, you simply end up with a cluster of moralistic stories and calls to social action.
    - c. The reality, however, is you don't need the cross-work of Christ to do social work. So a person who chooses to approach the Gospel leaves a responsible reader of the Gospel with many questions as to the purpose behind these moralistic stories and calls to social action.
  5. In the end, we must read everything in light of where the entire narrative is driving—which is the cross.
    - a. As a result, every parable, miracle, etc. is always about salvation, or that which will define the coming community of Christ.
    - b. Our passage, here, must be read this way as well.
- v. Stylistically, Luke loves to write in 3's.
1. So, here, we have an example of that.
  2. He picks 3 groups of people (i.e., crowds, tax-collectors, soldiers).
  3. As such, we shouldn't read too much into why he picks these three.
  4. Rather, due to Luke's style, he uses three to drive home the point, but it's always a singular point.
  5. So what he's doing is driving home the singular characteristic which must be definitive of a true repentance—which is nothing less than the all-important nature of a genuine love.

- a. If you were to boil down all three responses of John, they'd all boil down to love.
- b. Everything John states reveals a true other-orientedness, which is the essence of love.
- c. Love is key, and it's to be the hallmark characteristic that will define the coming community (i.e., the Church) of the Messiah.

3. Love: The defining characteristic of the Church.

- a. There's at least 59 "one another" passages in the NT. So this is not something we can take lightly.
- b. Jesus states the world will know His community by their love for one another (John 13:35).
- c. The love of the Church is very different from what the world calls love. It must be the kind of love which defines God Himself. For God is love (c.f., 1Jn. 4:8).
  - i. God is the standard of love.
  - ii. This love is not marked by acceptance, but sacrifice and service.
- d. 1John: A true love for God is always seen in a true love for the brethren.
  - i. 2:15-17.
    - 1. A true love for the Father pushes out a love for the world.
    - 2. A true love for the world pushes out a love for the Father.
    - 3. True love for God is always evidenced by doing the will of the God (17).
      - a. In other words, a true love for God is never evidenced by what a person says, or claims to believe.
      - b. Rather, a true love is always seen in a true obedience.
      - c. In the context of 1John, obedience is something very specific—a love for the brethren.

- ii. 3:10-11.
  - iii. 3:23.
  - iv. 4:7-8.
  - v. 4:12.
  - vi. 3:16-17.
- e. The overwhelming point is that true evidence of repentance is always seen in a true love for God. And a true love for God is always seen in a true love for the brethren. This is an inseparable reality. To think otherwise it to simply deceive yourself.
- i. A person who doesn't attend the local church is evidencing unrepentance.
  - ii. A person who attends a church, but holds the church at arms-length, is evidencing unrepentance.
  - iii. Repentance is always (and only) seen in a person's abiding love for the brethren—not merely in word, but deed (1Jn. 3:18).

#### 4. Conclusion.

- a. For those who work hard at loving their brothers and sisters in Christ, they ought to have enormous confidence that their repentance is genuine.
- b. But those who actively choose to keep the church at arms-length, they must get busy repenting. They must evidence a true love for the brethren.