

“God’s Highway to the Heart”

(Luke 3:7-17 ~ Part 1)

Introduction

- Being reconciled to God is certainly not easy, but it is also not complicated. It is not only for those with a high I.Q., or those who can figure out some spiritual mystery or “Bible code.” In the Bible, the word “reconciled” refers to making peace where there was chaos, hatred, or war. It typically refers to the removal of hostility and enmity between the sinner and God.

Rom 5:10-11 ~ “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” (see Rom.1:30, 8:7-8; Col.1:21; Jms.4:4)

2 Cor 5:17-21 ~ “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

- The cost of reconciliation was the sacrificial and substitutional death of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. The way to be reconciled to God, through faith in Christ, is through repentance. All we have to do is, in the strength and wisdom that God provides, turn from sin and turn to God. Again, it is not necessarily easy but certainly not complicated.
- This is exactly what is taught in the passage before us this morning.

Luke 3:7-17 ~ “[John] said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ⁹Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.’ ¹⁰And the crowds asked him, ‘What then shall we do?’ ¹¹And he answered them, ‘Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.’ ¹²Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, ‘Teacher, what shall we do?’ ¹³And he said to them, ‘Collect no more than you are authorized to do.’ ¹⁴Soldiers also asked him, ‘And we, what shall we do?’ And he said to them, ‘Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.’ ¹⁵As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, ¹⁶John answered them all, saying, ‘I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.’”

- The overarching theme of John the Baptist’s preaching was the message of repentance.

Luke 3:3 ~ “And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matt.3:2; Mk.1:4)

Luke 3:8 ~ “Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. ...” (Matt.3:8)

Luke 3:16 ~ “John answered them all, saying, ‘I baptize you with water [“for repentance” (Matt.3:11)] ...”

➤ The Greek word translated *“repentance”* (*metanoia*, n.) [or *“repent”* (*metanoeō*, vb.)] literally means “to perceive afterwards” (or “to change one’s mind”) but its usage in the New Testament means much more. By simple definition, to repent is to turn from sin and to turn to God. It conveys a radical transformation of obeying God rather than disobeying God; of walking according to God’s will as opposed to against His will; of living a life that is pleasing to God instead of being displeasing to Him. An insincere, or a shallow, repentance is no repentance at all.

✓ Illust: “Both noun and verb denote a radical, moral turn of the whole person from sin and to God. ... An accurate understanding of the use of *metanoeō* and *metanoia* in the NT is essential to grasp the gospel message, because it does not allow for someone to obtain salvation simply by intellectually believing that Jesus is the Son of God without repenting of sins and turning to live for him” (William D. Mounce, *Mounce’s*

Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words ; “Repent/Repentance”).

- Without true repentance, a person cannot be saved (see Acts 2:38). This is because a true saving faith involves turning from sin as one turns to the Savior (see Rom.6:1-2, 6, 15; 2Cor.5:17; 1Jn.3:9). As we saw in my last sermon, in addition to John the Baptist, we see that Jesus and the apostles all preached a Gospel message of repentance (see Matt.4:17; Lk.5:32; 13:3, 5; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 26:20; Rev.2:5, 16, 21, 22; 3:3, 19).
- In the passage before us this morning – and, Lord willing, next Lord’s Day – we find six marks of true repentance. We will cover three of them this morning.

True repentance ...

1. Reveals a genuine sorrow for, and hatred of, sin (vs.7)

- As we have seen, John the Baptist remained in the wilderness until it came time for him to announce Jesus’ public ministry.

Luke 1:80 ~ “And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.”

Luke 3:2-4 ~ “... the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

⁴As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”

- To set the scene, John has emerged out of his “wilderness years” – wearing *“a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist”*, and eating *“locusts and wild honey”* (Matt. 3:4) – preaching a message of repentance, and baptizing people as an external demonstration of their repentance (Rom.6:4). His overarching purpose in life was to prepare the people to receive the coming of Jesus Christ. As he was preaching, and baptizing, John saw in *“the crowds that came out to be baptized by him”* (vs.7) *“many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism”* (Matt.3:7).

These were the religious leaders who were effectively guilty of idolatry as they lived hypocritical and self-righteous lives. While they were very religious, they were utterly unsaved. Keep in mind, these are the very same people who were instrumental in handing Jesus over to be crucified. They adamantly rejected Jesus as the Christ, they were envious of His popularity, they hated Him, and on several occasions tried to kill Him.

- In calling them a *“brood of vipers”* (vs.7; *gennēma echidna*), John was essentially referring to them as “children, or family, of snakes.” His likening them to venomous snakes as their hypocrisy was a poison that affected others (Matt.23:15). This figure of speech could also describe them as workers of the devil, as he is described as a serpent (Gen.3:1; 2Cor.11:31).

John 8:42-47 ~ “Jesus said to them [i.e., the Jews who did not believe in Him], ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me.

⁴³Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. ⁴⁴You are of

your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.'"

- John's message may not seem very loving or kind. In fact, some would no doubt find his message mean and offensive. But John's language reveals something that has been largely lost in contemporary Christianity (in America) today. That is, speaking the truth even if it is (or perceived as) offensive or unloving.

Some people may all-too-quickly assert, "Jesus would never preach, or speak, in such a way!"

Matt 12:33-37 ~ "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. ³⁶I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Matt 23:29-33 ~ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, ³⁰saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' ³¹Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. ³²Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. ³³You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?" [note: Matthew 23:13-29 records that Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees "*hypocrites*" (*hypokritēs*) – to their faces – six times, and pronounced "*woe*" upon them for their hypocrisy an additional seven times]

- John was not being mean or trying to be hurtful. He was trying to break them free from their prideful self-righteous deception. For, by the very nature of deception, the one who is deceived often does not know or believe that he is deceived. He was trying to awaken them from their spiritual stupor; he was trying to correct their self-centered perspective; he was trying to shatter their prideful delusion. As the saying goes, "It takes hard words to break hard hearts."

Too many churches today are seeker-driven or sinner-centered, rather than Holy Spirit driven and Christ-centered. Too many churches are trying to "win" the sinner at all cost, marketing a false gospel and proclaiming unbiblical messages. For the sake of popularity and approval, such churches placate sinners by preaching politically correct, self-esteem building, and inoffensive messages. In the end, they trivialize salvation, distort the gospel, make a mockery of Christ's church, and harvest false believers.

Oftentimes such things are done in the name of "love" (which is only a love of self). But it is absolutely unloving to let a person wallow or die in their sins and not try to save them. It is not loving to dissuade a sinner from repentance. It is not loving to help a sinner feel good about his/her sins. It is not loving to tell people they are saved when they are not. It is not loving to preach a "sinner friendly" sermon that does not instruct/encourage the sinner to repent of sin.

- John made no such mistake. With an actual (biblical) love for sinners, he confronted them in their sin and exhorted them to genuinely repent of their sins. He knew that they were motivated by a self-righteous and self-serving religion, wanting merely to add John's baptism to their religious resumé. John was not trying to amass a large following, he was not interested in being politically correct, nor did he desire the acceptance or approval of sinners (Gal.1:10).

These hypocritical religious leaders were not truly repentant – they did not have a genuine sorrow for, and hatred of, sin. They were trying to "*flee from the wrath*" (vs.7) of God by religiously being baptized. The imagery is powerful. Like snakes slithering to water to escape a grassfire, they religious leaders thought that the act of baptism could save them. They had "*the appearance of godliness*" (2Tim.3:5) but they were unrepentant and unsaved.

✓Illust: Renowned Christian preacher and writer, J.C. Ryle (1816-1900) outlined “Five Marks of Repentance”:

- a) True repentance begins with KNOWLEDGE of sin. The eyes of the penitent man are opened. He sees with dismay and confusion the length and breadth of God's holy law, and the extent, the enormous extent, of his own transgressions. He discovers, to his surprise, that in thinking himself a "good sort of man," and a man with a "good heart," he has been under a huge delusion. He finds out that, in reality, he is wicked, and guilty, and corrupt, and evil in God's sight. His pride breaks down. His high thoughts melt away. He sees that he is a great sinner. This is the first step in true repentance.
- b) True repentance goes on to work SORROW for sin. The heart of a penitent man is touched with deep remorse because of his past transgressions. He is cut to the heart to think that he should have lived so madly and so wickedly. He mourns over time wasted, over talents misspent, over God dishonored, over his own soul injured. The remembrance of these things is grievous to him. The burden of these things is sometimes almost intolerable. When a man so sorrows, you have the second step in true repentance.
- c) True repentance proceeds, further, to produce CONFESSION of sin. The tongue of a penitent man is loosed. He feels he must speak to that God against whom he has sinned. Something within him tells him he must cry to God, and pray to God, and talk with God, about the state of his own soul. He must pour out his heart, and acknowledge his iniquities, at the throne of grace. They are a heavy burden within him, and he can no longer keep silence. He can keep nothing back. He will not hide anything. He goes before God, pleading nothing for himself, and willing to say, "I have sinned against heaven and before You—my iniquity is great. God be merciful to me, a sinner!" When a man goes thus to God in confession, you have the third step in true repentance.
- d) True repentance, furthermore, shows itself in a thorough BREAKING OFF from sin. The life of a penitent man is altered. The course of his daily conduct is entirely changed. A new King reigns within his heart. He puts off the old man. What God commands he now desires to practice; and what God forbids he now desires to avoid. He strives in all ways to keep clear of sin, to fight with sin, to war with sin, to get the victory over sin. He ceases to do evil. He learns to do well. He breaks off sharply from bad ways and bad companions. He labors, however feebly, to live a new life. When a man does this, you have the fourth step in true repentance.
- e) True repentance, in the last place, shows itself by producing in the heart a settled habit of deep HATRED of all sin. The mind of a penitent man becomes a mind habitually holy. He abhors that which is evil, and cleaves to that which is good. He delights in the law of God. He comes short of his own desires not unfrequently. He finds in himself an evil principle warring against the spirit of God. He finds himself cold when he would be hot; backward when he would be forward; heavy when he would be lively in God's service. He is deeply conscious of his own infirmities. He groans under a sense of indwelling corruption. But still, for all that, the general bias of his heart is towards God, and away from evil. He can say with David, "I count all Your precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way." (Psalm. 119:128.) When a man can say this, you have the fifth, or crowning step, of true repentance.

(Old Paths by J. C. Ryle, Monergism Books; © 2016)

➤ True repentance reveals a genuine sorrow for, and hatred of, sin (see Rom.7:15; Jd.1:23; Ps.97:10). The act of repentance cannot save anyone, but those who are truly saved are repentant. Repentance is not merely emotional, and it is not merely a religious (heartless) act. It is the right response of one who knows they have sinned before God, and long to be forgiven by God. For they truly desire to leave their life of sin, and follow Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

John 5:14 ~ “Afterward Jesus found him [i.e., the paralyzed man He healed (vs.5)] in the temple and said to him, ‘See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.’”

John 8:7-11 ~ “And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, ‘Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.’ ⁸And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰Jesus stood up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ ¹¹She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.’”

Luke 5:32 ~ “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” (see Lk.13:1-5)

Isa 1:15-20 ~ “When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. ¹⁶Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, ¹⁷learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause. ¹⁸Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. ¹⁹If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; ²⁰but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

- Those who are truly saved are those who are truly repentant. While they still struggle with temptation and sin, true believers have a genuine sorrow for and hatred of sin.
- ✓ **Illust:** The Puritan Pastor, Matthew Henry, put it like this: “The joy of the Lord will arm us against the assaults of our spiritual enemies and put our mouths out of taste for those pleasures with which the tempter baits his hook.”

Rom 6:1-2 ~ “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”

2. Reflects a heartfelt and humble obedience to Christ (vs.8a)

- Secondly, true repentance reflects a heartfelt and humble obedience to Christ. Simply put, if Christ is truly in you than Christlikeness will come out of you; if the Holy Spirit of God is truly within you than God’s holiness will be displayed in your life; if God is truly in you than you will seek to live a godly life.
- John the Baptist put it this way: “*Bear fruits in keeping with repentance*” (vs.8). Those who are truly saved, truly repentant, will produce the “*fruits*” (*karpōs*) of righteousness. There is both a price and a product of repentance. The price of repentance is genuine sorrow for and renunciation of sin. This, of course, can only happen because Jesus – through His sacrificial and substitutionary death – paid the full penalty for all the sin of all who would ever believe (Is.53:4-6; 2Cor.5:21). The price of repentance is dying to self.

The product of repentance is living for Christ. Whereas the price of repentance is the death of the old self (apart from Christ), the product of repentance is the life of the new self (in Christ). True Christians no longer want to live in sin, for they ultimately desire to live for their Savior.

Rom 6:4 ~ “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” (Rom.8:4)

2 Cor 5:17 ~ “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (Gal.6:15)

Eph 2:10 ~ “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Eph.4:1, 17)

Col 1:10 ~ “so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” (Col.2:6)

1 John 2:6 ~ “whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.”

- John used the simple, yet profound, analogy of the fruit that is produced from a fruit tree. Healthy apple trees produce apples. If a tree produces cherries then it is not an apple tree. So too, if a person is truly saved – truly in Christ and indwelt by the Spirit of God – then their life will produce the fruit of godliness. That is, they “*Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. ...*” (vs.8).

Luke 6:43-44 ~ “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush.”

John 15:1-6 ~ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ... ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”

- While none of us live perfectly righteous lives (Jms.3:2; Rom.7:15), true Christians will not condone or rationalize their sin. Christians do not willfully, unrepentantly, practice sin. Christians, even when they give into temptation and sin, seek to live a godly life in Christ. When they sin, they genuinely confess that sin and truly repent of sin – they do not want an unbroken pattern of sin in their lives.

1 John 1:6 ~ “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.”

1 John 3:4-10 ~ “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ... ⁶No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ... ⁸Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. ... ⁹No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. ¹⁰By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”

2 Cor 7:8-10 ~ “For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it – though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. ⁹As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. ¹⁰For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.”

- Those who are truly repentant will desire and strive to live a godly life – to renounce sin and follow the Savior. Again, by simple definition, to repent is to turn from sin and turn to God. If a person does not truly turn from sin (or turn to God) they are not repentant. Those who are truly “*in Christ*” will “*Bear [the] fruits*” (vs.8) of Christlikeness. They will produce the fruit that comes from the vine, which is Christ.

3. Rejects the saving merit of human works or ancestry (vs.8b)

- Thirdly, true repentance rejects the saving merit of human works or ancestry. Those who are truly repentant reject any notion that they are religiously or inherently good. They know that they can never do enough good to warrant God’s saving grace.

Rom 3:10-12, 23 ~ “as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹²All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. ... ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”

Eph 2:8-9 ~ “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Gal 2:16 ~ “yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”

Titus 3:5 ~ “he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit”

2 Tim 1:9 ~ “who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began”

- Knowing that the scribes and Pharisees were self-righteous hypocrites, John launch a preemptive strike on their claim to be children of Abraham: “... *And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.*” (vs.8).

John 8:39-47 ~ “They answered him, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did,⁴⁰ but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. ⁴¹You are doing the works your father did.’ They said to him, ‘We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father – even God.’ ⁴²Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. ⁴³Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. ⁴⁴You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.’”

John 1:12-13 ~ “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

- Salvation has never been through human works or ancestry. Everyone who has ever been saved, and will ever be saved, is saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The Old Testament saints were saved by their faith in the Messiah to come (Rom.4:3; Heb.11), and New Testament saints are saved by their faith in the Messiah who has come.

John went on to say, “*For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham*” (vs.8). In other words, “Since God made Adam out of the dirt, He can ‘*children for Abraham*’ out of stones.” For God gives spiritual life to those who are “*dead*” (Eph.2:1; see Rom.8:7). The truth is, we bring nothing to our salvation other than our need for it (see Rom.3:22; Phil.3:9; 2Cor.5:21).

✓**Illust:** “The only thing you contribute to your salvation is the sin that makes it necessary” (unknown).

✓**Illust:** “Rock of Ages”, written by Augustus Montague Toplady (in 1776):

“Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to the cross I cling; Naked, come to Thee for dress; Helpless look to Thee for grace; Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die.”

Ezek 36:26-28 ~ “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. ²⁸You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.” (cf. Eph.2:1-5)

- No one deserves or earns God’s saving grace – not by good works or religious heritage. The scribes and Pharisees believed that they were entitled to salvation because of their religious resumé and pedigree. They believed that they warranted salvation, and they believed the Gentiles did not. But the Gospel is for everyone who truly receives, by faith, that Jesus is the one and only Son of God and one and only Savior from God.

Rom 1:16 ~ “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

Gal 3:27-29 ~ “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

➤ This is not only seen in the “doctrinal” verses of Scripture, but also in the narrative passages in Scripture:

Luke 16:19-31 ~ “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ ²⁵But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ ²⁷And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house – ²⁸for I have five brothers – so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

Matt 15:21-29 ~ “And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²²And behold, a Canaanite [i.e., Gentile] woman from that region came out and was crying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.’ ²³But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she is crying out after us.’ ²⁴He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ ²⁵But she came and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, help me.’ ²⁶And he answered, ‘It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.’ ²⁷She said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’ ²⁸Then Jesus answered her, ‘O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.’ And her daughter was healed instantly.”

Mark 7:24-30 ~ “And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. ²⁵But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. ²⁶Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophoenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷And he said to her, ‘Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.’ ²⁸But she answered him, ‘Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’ ²⁹And he said to her, ‘For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.’ ³⁰And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.”

Conclusion

➤ To repent means to turn from sin and to turn to God. We are called to not merely acknowledge our sin, or just confess our sin, but actually (sincerely) desire to not sin. Again, repentance is not a means of earning God’s saving grace. It is the genuine recognition of sin, and the heartfelt desire to be free from the power of that sin. It is not only hating the fact that you have sinned but also hating sin.