

Repentance: The Gift of God

by Glenn Meldrum

Repentance is a gift from God that brings us back to Him, restores our dignity, and leads to revival and victory over sin.

Scripture: Romans 6:12

Topics: "Repentance", "Revival"

Description

Glenn Meldrum preaches about the profound impact of heartfelt repentance as a gift from God, emphasizing its role in true revival. Sin is portrayed as the great separator between God and man, while repentance serves as the restorer of that broken relationship. The Biblical message of repentance is highlighted as the sword of the Spirit that brings salvation, maturity, and hope for a heaven-sent revival, as seen in historical accounts like David Brainerd's experiences with Native Americans in the 1740s.

Transcript

Heartfelt repentance is a gift from God. It is a constant reality of every true revival. Sin is the great separator between God and man, repentance the great restorer. The Biblical message of repentance is the sword of the Spirit that brings salvation to the lost, maturity to the saints and hope for a heaven sent revival.

When revival falls from heaven, the Spirit breaks into the lives of people in supernatural ways. He does this to accomplish the twofold work of repentance--turning men to God as they turn away from their sin. David Brainerd saw revival touch the Native Americans during the 1740's in whole region of Susquehanna in Pennsylvania and in New Jersey. After one account Brainerd wrote, "The power of God seemed to descend upon the assembly 'like a rushing, mighty wind' and with astonishing energy bore down on all before it. I stood amazed at the influence that seized the audience almost universally and could compare it to nothing more aptly than the irresistible force of a mighty torrent. . . . Almost all persons of all ages were bowed down with concern together, and scarce one was able to withstand the shock of this surprising operation. Old men and women who had been drunken wretches for many years, and some little children not more than six or seven years of age, appeared in distress for their souls, as well as persons of middle age" (Brainerd, 379). During seasons of revival the Holy Spirit is manifested in remarkable ways to bring the gift of repentance to sleeping saints and to a perishing world.

DIGNITY AND DEPRAVITY

The Genesis account of Adam's creation and his willful sin reveals the dignity and depravity of mankind. In all of creation, only the human race was formed by the Creator's own hands in His own image. This bestows upon humanity an immense privilege, dignity and responsibility. God created mankind to walk with Him in intimate fellowship. Originally, Adam and Eve were predisposed to live holy. God's gift of a free will empowered them to choose either to keep His law or to break it.

The history of Adam and Eve's fall (Gen. 3:1-24) was meant to be literally interpreted as an authentic historical event. Their once perfect character, corrupted by sin, perverted their original dignity. Sin, guilt, shame and the desire to hide from God's presence are some of the repercussions of their purposeful act of rebellion. The unbelief and disobedience of our first parents brought misery and ruin upon themselves and on all their descendants. Now a universal depravity touches all of mankind. Both the Scriptures, and life itself, clearly reveals that every person sins. We become responsible to a holy God for our sins as soon as we are capable of moral actions (Rom. 1-3).

Adam's deliberate act of breaking God's law changed his original character of holiness to one of sin and rebellion. This produced a predisposition in him to sin that has been passed down to his entire progeny. Spiritual, physical and relational death is the wages sin pays. Jesus is the only remedy to Adam's fall. The Savior stated that a man must be born again to enter the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3). Through Christ alone can we be forgiven of our sins and find victory over the power of sin. The Author of Life imparts new life to the penitent sinner and begins restoring the dignity that was marred through the deceitfulness of sin by transforming the fallen character.

WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

By nature, by choice, and by character, every person is a sinner. Yes, even Christians. What is a sinner? A sinner is a person who sins. Sin is the transgression or breaking of God's law. "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1 Jn. 3:4). The unsaved practice their sin; true Christians strive to live free from it. God's call to turn from our sin is His goodness and love revealed.

The Bible is a book of repentance. Its primary focus is that the Father sent the Son to save sinners. The Old Testament looks forward to the coming Messiah while the New Testament is His self-disclosure. Together they comprise the history of redemption that teaches us how to walk in fellowship with a holy God through a lifestyle of repentance.

The Christian life both begins, and is sustained, through repentance. A lifestyle of repentance means a person immediately repents of sin the moment he comprehends its presence, and will even turn from the questionable things. This is a refusal to allow sin to "reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires" (Rom. 6:12). A lifestyle of repentance allows men to walk with God in unbroken fellowship--a privilege beyond imagination. Unbroken fellowship with the Lord is the right motive to live such a lifestyle.

In ancient Hebraic thought repentance meant returning to God. The most commonly used Old Testament word for repentance is shubh. It fundamentally means, "To sigh, groan, lament, or grieve over one's doings. . . [It is] such a sorrow for sin as leads one to turn away from sin" (Wright, 1). It is a radical change of one's attitude towards sin and God. Shubh incorporates the conscious moral decision to forsake sin in thought, word and deed and to enter into fellowship with the Lord.

There are three Greek words used in the New Testament that signifies repentance. The first is the verb, metamelomai, which indicates a change of mind, but not necessarily a change of heart. Judas, who

betrayed Jesus "repented," or was remorseful, but did not change the direction of his life (Mt. 27:3). The verb *metanoeo*, along with the cognate noun *metanoia* are used of a true act of repentance that brings about a change of mind and purpose of life. "Repentance is a full-blooded, wholehearted, uncompromising renunciation of one's former attitude and outlook. It is a change of heart that always results in a change of course" (Wallis, 53).

God's call to repentance is a call to intimacy. "I love you child" is the Spirit's plea, "and I want to come close to you, but your sin is keeping Me from demonstrating my love to you. It is time to get the sin out." God's love is openly displayed through Calvary, which is nothing other than a call to repentance. Jesus did not come into the world to condemn it, but to save it through His tender mercies. "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pe. 3:9).

The convicting power of the Holy Ghost is NEVER, absolutely NEVER, a negative work. For the sinner to feel shame for his sin is a gift from God. Paul asked, "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness (goodness, KJV) leads you toward repentance?" (Rom. 2:4). To shun the Savior's call to repentance shows contempt for His kindness. To bring sinners to contrition is the kindness or goodness of God revealed. The message of repentance is the Biblical message of God's love to sinful humanity.

THE PREACHING OF THE CROSS

The preaching of the cross is the victorious message of repentance. Through the message of repentance people enter into relationship with the Living God, mature as disciples and by means of it revival can come. David Brainerd was a preacher of the cross. His first audience in Susquehanna was a few women and children. When the Spirit descended, men and women came from all over the region. With intense earnestness they pressed upon the missionary to hear the message of salvation.

Strong, brave men fell at Brainerd's "feet in anguish of soul." The Spirit pierced their hearts with His arrows of conviction. Their consuming cry became, "Lord, have mercy on me!" Brainerd was deeply moved by their passionate repentance. "The woods were filled with the sound of great mourning, and beneath the Cross every man fell as if he and the Saviour God alone were there. Gradually as the missionary spoke, there came to them, one by one, the peace and comfort of the Gospel" (Shearer, 37-38). The preaching of the cross can bring with it an overwhelming conviction of sin--this is the love of God revealed. Deep conviction that brings profound repentance yields the fruits of radical conversions.

When the preaching of the cross is neglected, or forsaken, men cannot be saved or delivered from sin. H. Richard Niebuhr lambasted liberal Christianity because they believed in "a God without wrath [who] brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross" (Dixon, 22). This old version of compromise has taken on a new face. Many churches desiring to present a "positive" message have removed anything that is offensive from their services. This crossless gospel of cheap grace has removed the Biblical Jesus, who is both a wonderful Savior and an "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense" (1 Pe. 2:8; NKJV). Such marketing techniques may generate large gatherings on Sunday mornings but is powerless in building Christ's spiritual kingdom.

It has become extremely popular in America to preach the positive messages of easy-believism that lulls people into a deathly spiritual sleep or that feeds the lusts of the flesh. Andrew Murray said, "It is comparatively easy to win people to a cross, but to a cross that leaves them uncrucified. Oh, beware of the cross that leaves you uncrucified" (Campbell, Fire). Duncan Campbell warned us in a sermon, "I dare

not compromise in order to accommodate the world, the flesh or the devil. But see the tendency today is to do that. I want to say dear people; tolerance at the expense of conviction and righteousness is just playing into the hands of the enemy" (Campbell, God's Answer).

Churches that do not preach the cross are like fish deprived of water--death is guaranteed. They are nothing more than community centers filled with self-help programs. Paul stated, "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18; KJV). There can be no revival apart from the preaching of the cross because the cross is the centerpiece of Christianity. Christ's death was God's redemptive mission to bring humanity to salvation and His resurrection the power that guaranteed our victory. The same cross that reveals our tremendous guilt offers our only hope.

THE PROBLEM OF UNREPENTANT HEARTS

To reject the preaching of repentance is to reject the Christ of the cross. The deceitfulness of sin, and the desire for a comfortable "Christianity," can make the preaching of the cross an unwelcome message. And yet, "No man can rightly value the redemption of Christ who has not seen himself lost and undone and absolutely without hope outside of the atonement" (Shaw, 7).

The Scriptures emphatically warn us not to harden our hearts, "as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert'" (Heb. 3:7-8). Hard hearts are unrepentant hearts. The Hebrew writer forewarned the church that she could harden her heart just as Israel did and suffer similar consequences.

The Christians at Laodicea had hardened their hearts. So Jesus rebuked them saying, "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17). Only a good God would warn a backslidden people of their dangerous situation. The Lord declared, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent" (Rev. 3:19; NKJV). This call to repentance was an act of divine compassion.

Hearts grow hard and reject the preaching of the cross when Christians think they have moved beyond the need of repentance. When some believers refused to repent during the 1950's Belgian Congo Revival they grieved the Holy Spirit. "One woman standing up with her arms upraised and her face radiant, talking about wheels within wheels and eyes within the wheels and patterns and above it all a great rainbow. It was straight out of Ezekiel. She spoke of the glory and began weeping when she said she saw the glory was in the midst of the Bible School and then it went out of the hall, across the courtyard and into the forest. She broke down, crying, 'It is because of our sin, our sin!'" (Roseveare, 2). The glory left when they ceased to respond to the call for repentance.

Self-righteousness

One consequence of an unrepentant heart is self-righteousness. This is the spiritual condition in which people think they are right with God based on their moral goodness. You could think of it as salvation through moral living. Solomon forewarned us saying, "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness" (Pr. 30:12; KJV). Whenever Christians forget they are sinners saved by grace they reject the preaching of the cross and ignore the guilt that accompanies the conviction of sin.

Multitudes of churchgoers think they are right with God because they have "accepted Christ" (but are they accepted by Him?), speak in tongues, or belong to a particular church. Trust, foolishly placed in moral goodness, water baptism, or a prayer once uttered but not lived out, puts people in a perilous position with eternal consequences.

Self-righteousness is the most hideous form of pride known to mankind. The Lord declared, "I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. No one repents of his wickedness, saying, 'What have I done?' Each pursues his own course like a horse charging into battle" (Jer. 8:6). The heart of self-righteousness is seen in the statement, "What have I done?" We are prone to view ourselves as innocent people. However, there is no such thing as an innocent sinner. Augustine stated that we must be so reduced in our own eyes "as to have nothing to present before God but 'our wretchedness and His mercy.' We are so wretched in our sinfulness that nothing else can ever save us except His mercy. But thank God, His mercy is all we need!" (Fenelon, 47).

Jesus dealt severely with the self-righteous. "For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him" (Mt. 21:32). Seven times in Matthew 23 Jesus pronounced, "Woe to you" against the self-righteous. This was a prophetic proclamation of doom from the lips of the Messiah. A stark contrast is seen between Christ's judgment of woe against the self-righteous and His compassion to rescue the worst of society. He said, "For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Mt. 9:13; NKJV).

The religious Pharisees of Christ's day typifies the self-righteous in our own. This spiritual state blinds people to their true condition before God and causes them to reject the Biblical word that "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6). If our righteous acts are like filthy rags before a holy God then what is our wickedness like to Him? We need to see ourselves as sinners and take the way of repentance. Charles Spurgeon understood the place of victory over sin and self-righteousness when he admitted, "I find that my sweetest, happiest, safest state is that of a poor, guilty, helpless sinner calling upon the name of the Lord and taking mercy from His hands, although I deserve nothing but His wrath" (Spurgeon, Praying 75-76).

The lies that we are "good people" must be torn down before revival can come. Roy Hession stated, "The breaking in of the truth about ourselves and about God, and the shattering of the illusion in which we have been living, is the beginning of revival for the Christian as it is of salvation for the lost. We cannot begin to see the grace of God in the face of Jesus Christ until we have seen the truth about ourselves and given a full answer to all its challenge. . . . The result is that we have lost sight of things as they really are, and are now living in a realm of complete illusion about ourselves" (Hession, We Would, 31-32). Shattering the illusion is as simple as looking in a mirror and seeing the reality of our spiritual situation. Otherwise, we remain spiritually blind to our sin and will reap the sorrow sin produces.

REPENTANCE BRINGS REVIVAL

Repentance and revival are radical and inseparable. Revival is God breaking into human history, upsetting lives and earthly kingdoms by transforming all who will repent. James Burns illustrated this well, "To the church, a revival means humiliation, a bitter knowledge of unworthiness and an open humiliating confession of sin on the part of her ministers and people. It is not the easy and glorious thing many think it to be, who imagine it fills the pews and reinstates the church in power and authority. It comes to scorch

before it heals; it comes to condemn ministers and people for their unfaithful witness, for their selfish living, for their neglect of the cross, and to call them to daily renunciation, to evangelical poverty and to a deep and daily consecration. That is why a revival has ever been unpopular with large numbers within the church. Because it says nothing to them of power such as they have learned to love, or of ease, or of success; it accuses them of sin; it tells them they are dead; it calls them to awake, to renounce the world and to follow Christ" (Pratney, 21). Revival brings with it the wondrous joy of forgiveness only after people have dealt with the heart wrenching reality of their sin.

During the Second Great Awakening Charles Finney witnessed the overwhelming conviction that occurs when God rends the heavens. One account came out of a village near Antwerp, New York. "I had not spoken to them . . . more than a quarter of an hour, when all at once an awful solemnity seemed to settle down upon them; the congregation began to fall from their seats in every direction, and cried for mercy. If I had had a sword in each hand, I could not have cut them off their seats as fast as they fell. Indeed nearly the whole congregation were either on their knees or prostrate, I should think, in less than two minutes from this first shock that fell upon them. Every one prayed for himself, who was able to speak at all. Of course I was obliged to stop preaching; for they no longer paid any attention" (Finney, Autobiography, 104). Spirit empowered conviction compels sinners to flee into the loving arms of Jesus. This is the miracle of repentance--to take rebels at war with the Lord of Hosts and turn them into sons and daughters of the King.

A national awakening came in the days of Ezra when he led the people into brokenness, and repentance. Ezra prayed:

O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens. From the days of our forefathers until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we and our kings and our priests have been subjected to the sword and captivity, to pillage and humiliation at the hand of foreign kings, as it is today (Ezra 9:6-7).

Such prayers of confession are an integral part of revival. Ezra had a healthy understanding of his sin, the spiritual condition of the people and of a God whose mercies are new every morning. As a result, he prayed according to the truth that would move heaven to shake earth.

East Africa saw revival for approximately forty years. When it finally came to the Belgian Congo they were overwhelmed with its earth shaking power. It began with Christians dealing with the reality of their sin before the revival burst forth among non-believers. At the Bible school in Ibambi the building actually shook. "It was seven o'clock on a Friday night. Jack Scholes, our field leader, had just come back from a trip in the south and he had seen revival down there. He stood up to speak about the revival and started to read from Scriptures. Suddenly we heard a hurricane storm. It was frightening!

"None of us stopped to think that this was strange because you don't get hurricane storms in July (we have them in February or March). We heard this hurricane coming and the elders began to take the shutters down . . . We looked out and it was moonlight and the palm trees were standing absolutely still against the moonlit sky. . . Then the building shook and the storm lanterns down the center of the building moved around. There was a terrific noise and a sense of external power around. We were all frightened--there must have been about five whites and 95 Africans present. You could sense fear all around.

"Jack stood at the front and said to us--'This is God, just pray--don't fear and don't interfere.' It was as if a force came in and we were shaking. There was no way you could control it and some were thrown to the ground off the benches as if someone had hurled them down! But no one was hurt. Everyone ceased to be conscious of anyone else.

"People began to confess publicly what you might call 'big sin' (and those were all Christians). They spoke of adultery, cheating, stealing, deceit. . . . We didn't leave the hall that whole weekend! Most of the time God was dealing with our sins. Some needed help from the pastors who moved around with much wisdom and encouragement. Then joy struck the repentant sinners" (Roseveare, 1-2).

How could a people remain the same after encountering the Living God in such a manner? Saints who have experienced the manifest presence of God will ache to see His glory again and again until their dying day. With passion they will live a lifestyle of repentance so they may see Him rend the heavens once more.

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