

Surrendering To God

by John White

This sermon emphasizes the importance of repentance as a key aspect of spiritual transformation. It highlights the need for a deep heart change that comes from seeing ourselves and God's love through the eyes of the Holy Spirit. Repentance leads to a radical shift in attitude towards sin, self, and God, resulting in a new fearlessness, a desire for restitution, a hatred of sin, and a transformed perspective on life.

Scripture: Romans 2:4, Isaiah 40:1, Luke 15:11, Mark 1:15, 2 Corinthians 7:10, Psalm 51:17, Acts 3:19, James 4:8, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Repentance", "Spiritual Transformation"

Description

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Transcript

Really at the beginning of this session, I would like to call those who sense that God, or that the witness of God is with their spirits in it, to take part in a further act of repentance. And before I do, I'm going to repeat a sentence seven times and then explain why I'm doing that. Perhaps if I repeat the sentence seven times, you will be less liable to forget it.

And then I want to talk about the principle it embodies and then call those of you who are willing and wish to take part in this act of repentance to stand as you do so, and I will lead you in prayer. The sentence is, the heart of intercession is identification with those for whom we intercede. The heart of intercession is identification with those for whom we intercede.

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In those days, it was syphilis and gonorrhea we were concerned with, clap and syph, we called them. And because I'd missed a class, I had to attend a class that medical students were not usually involved in. And it took place at night down a dark street in the middle of the city.

And I went there and knocked at the door and a great big male nurse pulled me inside and said, stand there, Sonny, in the queue. And I said, I've come to see the doctor. He said, so has everybody else, just stand there, Sonny.

And I said, but I'm a medical student. He said, Sonny, you got it the same way everybody else got it, so stand there. Eventually I got through to him.

But I learned something. I learned that I did not want to identify with those men. Standing in the queue would mean I was one of them.

I wasn't one of the syphilis, I was one of the holy ones who were healing me. Jesus once stood in a queue. A queue to get baptized.

He wasn't getting baptized as a good example for us. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. When you went down and let John baptize you, what you were saying was, I am a sinner and I need to get right with God and turn from my sin and be forgiven for it.

But Jesus never sinned. You know, if I didn't want to be identified with those guys, I know Jesus hated sin. I wonder what it felt like for him to stand like that with us, he who knew no sin, who abhorred sin, stood with us in our sin and later took its guilt upon him.

If you read, and do read sometime again, Nehemiah chapter one and Daniel chapter nine, we'll not turn to them now, you'll find two of the great intercessors in the Bible and how do they pray about the state of their nation? They say, we have sinned, we have done these things, we and our fathers, and they begin to cite incidents hundreds of years before, owning responsibility, for there is a sense of community in the scriptures which we lack in the 20th century of individualism. The free enterprise system, and I'm not criticizing the free enterprise system, particularly, it's like any other political system, and sometimes it's useful, sometimes it's not, but the free enterprise system is based on individualism. And much of our philosophy today, much of our writing is the same.

There is a sense of community in the scriptures. We, who are British, are part of a nation, part of a history. It's a history in which there are good things.

God has been merciful to our nation. It is a history also in which there are bad things. We pride ourselves that we're somewhat better than other nations, and we criticize them, but God says, never mind them, I'm talking to you now.

The tower beside which our hotel is placed is not called the Bloody Tower for nothing. There have been very evil things as well as very glorious things in our nation's history. Just over a year ago, I was in Hong Kong on one of the rather frequent visits these days, and I led the citizens of Hong Kong, the Christian citizens of Hong Kong, in an act of repentance.

First, I had to say to them, look, I am British. You know the history of this colony. You know that it's based on sin.

It's based on British sin, that is, the sin of the opium trade. A godly, well, certainly a righteous Chinese general fought against it and lost, and so the British were granted, we the British were granted a concession, primarily in order that we might have the opium trade and make money out of the enslavement of Chinese to opium. Now, that's just one incident.

So I had to confess to them, I'm sorry. I stand before you as one of those people, but of course I had to point out to them, but you guys have prospered by this. You, who are mostly middle class, who listened to me, I said, in Hong Kong, are those whose very prosperity arose out of that evil trade, for there was a financial basis laid which made for continuing prosperity.

And the educational system that you've been brought up in, the university scholarships you have and have benefited from, the Bible schools even that you attended were financed partly by money from that trade. Now, I'm not exaggerating. This is truth.

You see, we think perhaps that we can shed the sins of our forefathers and the sins of the Christian church in this country. We can't. We are all somehow involved in that.

There is an involvement in it which belongs to the fact that we are one people. Now, look at scripture. Look first, if you like, at those two chapters, Nehemiah 1 and Daniel 9. And you will see that this is how God views the matter.

I live in Vancouver at the moment, and I have to identify with the sins of Vancouver. Why? Because I drive a car and the streets along which I drive are paved partly by good work and partly by sin. That is to say the money comes from both sinful enterprises and good enterprises.

Even the money from prostitution goes by an indirect channel into paving the roads along which I drive my car. And some of the financial benefits that accrue to me come in that way. I won't mention the particular sinful things in Vancouver, but I cannot help but be entangled with this sin.

We are entangled with it. All the more reason, then, why we should confess it on behalf of and plead the mercy of God on behalf of. Now, you may not agree with me without thinking it through, and I'm not going to ask you to stand.

If you don't, I'd rather you didn't stand. But we have heard about the judgment of God on those segments and those members of the church who will not repent. I mentioned to you in the first talk about judgment that that brief instant in which God pulled aside the curtain and let me see a certain aspect of judgment in the spirit.

And my reaction was to say, no, please don't, you mustn't stop, you see. You see, John talked this morning about the judgments of God that are coming on certain people, both in the church and outside the church, first in the church, then outside the church. I tell you, if you caught a glimpse of the judgment of God, you would not wish it on your worst enemy.

I've been angry with certain Christian men in the church. I've been angry about certain trends. I've even felt self-righteous.

I'm not saying it's right to feel that way. It was partly my flesh. But when I saw that glimpse, no way I couldn't wish that on anybody.

Now, if we are to intercede effectively, we must identify with those for whom we intercede, not as people who gather our skirts and say, well, we're not really like you, but we will call ourselves the same, and we'll say we instead of they. No, no, no, we are part of it. We're part of it.

We're involved in it. Now, if this witnesses to your spirit, and if you wish to do so, I will lead you in prayer for the church in England and in the English-speaking world. I don't mean that you are to feel deeply about it.

That's something that comes with time. But if and only if you wish to do this, then stand now, and I will lead you in prayer. We know, Lord, that you are a holy God, and what we're doing now we want to do not in order to get something from you.

We want to do it because it's right. We want to do it because we owe you this. We acknowledge with gratitude the glorious things you have done in our nation's history, and those men and women who have sacrificed their lives for the cause of the gospel in our country, and to teach us the scriptures.

We thank you for the things that you've done in past revivals and the political changes that resulted. We thank you for the abolition of the slave trade. We thank you for the abolition of child labor.

We thank you for more just labor laws. There are many other things for which we thank you, glorious things. We thank you that sometimes our nation has stood for righteousness.

But, Lord, we are also aware that our nation has stood for evil as well, and has done evil and abominable things. And we confess that we, as a nation, have sinned before you. That at times we have not acknowledged you at all, and at other times we have acknowledged you with our lips while our hearts were far from you.

Yet, we as a nation cast ourselves on your mercy and we say, Lord, be merciful. Lord, be merciful and remember us. If your name is merciful, this is the only thing that we can plead, and we plead your nature.

We plead the fact that you are a good and a merciful and a long-suffering God. And we say, do not let your mercy end at this point, but pour out in mercy your love and your compassion, and bring deep repentance, not only in our own hearts, but throughout our nation. For we have sinned, and our fathers and mothers have sinned.

Our kings and our queens have sinned, our prime ministers and governors have sinned, and we've gone on electing them. Have mercy on us all, Lord. Have mercy on the British nation and the English-speaking nations throughout the world.

And Lord, we are part of the church, and our churches are riddled with sin. We thank you for past revivals, and we ask that you'll be merciful to those who are caught and bound in sin among us at the moment, for we ourselves have been caught and bound in sin. And even now, Lord, the motions of sin are within us.

We confess that we are people in whose lives the law of sin operates, except we cast ourselves before you and trust you. So, Lord, on behalf of the church, we say, we are sinners. Have mercy on your people.

Revive us again, O Lord. Cause us to repent. And Lord, revive the church in this nation, and revive the entire nation.

So we lift our hearts and hands to you, even as we bow our heads in sorrow, and say we deserve your judgment, but we plead for your mercy. Amen. Please be seated.

And today, I want to help you to begin to understand what repentance is all about. And I will play fast and loose with the notes. It might be better with, for those of you who are English speaking, not even to have the notes open.

You can look at them afterwards, because I'm adding a lot. I will begin with the first two stories. What I'm going to do is read four stories to you.

And then we can sort of stand up and turn around and sit down again. And then I'll talk about the theology of it. Two of the stories are about contemporary figures.

One of them is about a group of Christians about 160, 170 years ago. And the other is about something that happened in the year 1492. All of them are by way of illustration of certain principles that are important in repentance.

First story concerns Chuck Colson. Chuck Colson, he of Watergate fame, the hatchet man, very close to President Nixon. And on the ninth night of August the 12th, 1973, Chuck Colson is sitting in his car in the dark.

He's just left politics for law, very prosperous law practice. He's now sitting pretty with lots of money, a chauffeur, a large Lincoln Continental, beautiful home, huge income. He's just spent time with Tom Phillips, the president of the Raytheon Company, the largest employer in New England and one of his clients.

But Phillips has just had an experience of the Lord. And he shared this to some extent with Chuck and also read to him a chapter, a chapter on pride from C.S. Lewis' Mere Christianity. Now Colson records his feelings and I quote from his own description of what happened.

Phillips had asked him, can I pray with you? And Colson said, no, I don't like to do anything under emotion and made it his escape. And then he says, outside in the darkness, the iron grip I'd kept on my emotions began to relax. Tears welled up in my eyes as I groped in the darkness for the right key to start my car.

Angrily, I brushed them away and started the engine. What kind of weakness is this? I said to nobody. The tears spilled over and suddenly I knew I had to go back into the house and pray with Tom.

I turned off the motor, got out of the car. As I did, the kitchen light went out, then the light in the dining room. Through the hall window, I saw Tom stand aside as Gert started to go up the stairs.

I stood for a moment staring at the darkened house, only one light burning now in an upstairs bedroom. Why hadn't I prayed when he gave me the chance? I wanted to so badly. Now I was alone, really alone.

As I drove out of Tom's driveway, the tears were flowing uncontrollably. There were no streetlights, no moonlight. The car headlights were flooding illumination before my eyes, but I was crying so hard, it was like trying to swim underwater.

I pulled to the side of the road, not more than a hundred yards from the entrance to Tom's driveway, the tires sinking into soft mounds of pine needles. I remember hoping that Tom and Gert wouldn't hear my sobbing, the only sound other than the chirping of crickets penetrating the still of the night. With my face

cupped in my hands, head leaning forward against the wheel, I forgot about machismo, about pretenses, about fears of being weak.

And as I did, I began to experience a wonderful feeling of being released. Then came the strange sensation that water was not only running down my cheeks, but surging through my whole body as well, cleansing and cooling as it went. They weren't tears of sadness or remorse, nor of joy, but somehow, tears of relief.

And then I prayed my first real prayer. God, I don't know how to find you, but I'm gonna try. I'm not much the way I am now, but somehow I want to give myself to you.

I didn't know how to say more, so I repeated over and over the words, take me, take me, take me. I had not accepted Christ. I still didn't know who he was.

My mind told me it was important to find that out first, to be sure that I knew what I was doing, that I meant it and would stay with it. Only, that night, something inside me was urging me to surrender. To whom or what, I didn't know.

I stayed there in the car, wet-eyed, praying, thinking for perhaps half an hour, perhaps longer, alone in the quiet of the dark night. Yet for the first time in my life, I was not alone at all. I don't understand all I read, but I know it represents repentance.

And I know there are many important things he says here which are characteristic of real repentance. It is, of course, a mystery, the relation between repentance and conversion, the relation between repentance and regeneration, the relation between repentance and almost anything that happens in our life. And I don't think we can even assign an order.

We're dealing with the realm of spirit here. And though we like to categorize things, that is in order that we may control it somehow. You can't control what God is doing.

Story number two concerns Christians, concerns a bunch of Welsh Christians early in the 19th century in a remote village in North Wales, in the Calvinistic Methodist church. If you didn't know such things existed, apparently they do. It sounds like a contradiction in terms to some of us, but Calvinistic Methodist it was.

And it was to distinguish it from the other kind of Methodist church, whose name I've forgotten, in that same village. The churches were rivals, so the pastors were friends. And the pastor of the Calvinistic Methodist church had seen something of revival in North America and had shared it with his friend and had come to teach about it.

He preached a difficult sermon. And following this, there was the Wednesday night business meeting and everyone came along to the Wednesday night business meeting really to complain and to get the pastor after his sermon. One of the elders got up, I'm reading from a diary that was published later.

One of the elders got up and said, it was a very difficult thing for a man to say amen under a ministry he felt condemning him. And as he said these things, he sat down as if fainting away. At this moment, there was something, the diarist in brackets says, I cannot say what it was, but that it was something that neither I nor anyone else had ever felt before.

Went through the whole congregation until everyone put down his head and wept. The following week, the two churches, our Wesleyan and Calvinistic Methodists, there's the Wesleyan Methodists in Wales and the Calvinistic Methodists in those days, united to keep prayer meetings every night. And a revival began with that business meeting in Wales.

Revivals can begin at any kind of meeting when the Lord takes over, which turned Wales upside down. I think I'm right in saying, I read the book describing the revival. I think I'm right in saying that three quarters of the public houses had to be closed down because they were going bankrupt.

The miners who were the principal ones, certainly in that area, who attended the public houses had such miserable lives that they sought refuge in excessive drinking. And there was a lot of drunkenness, but as the revival swept, all sorts of social changes began to take place. Story number three concerns a man named General Ponce Enrile.

Ponce Enrile was the general who assisted President Aquino to become president and overthrow the previous tyrant. Later, he was accused of sponsoring an attempt to overthrow Aquino in turn because he was full of political ambitions and he spent a time in a prison camp. But at some point during that period, he had begun to attend a Bible study run by an American missionary.

His son had persuaded him to go along so that he might know about the scriptures. As a result, he was converted. And this, I have here a couple of extracts from speeches he made, one speech to a mixed group in public and another to a group of political and military leaders.

On June the 16th, 1990, he said, it is perhaps correct to say that every true believer in Christianity has an individual encounter with the Lord. My sins are my own and your sins are your own in a very personal way. Whether the sins are the same in character or not, they are peculiarly personal to the sinner.

And it is the sinner, no one else, who must repent for them. For our Lord Jesus said in Mark 115, the time has come, the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.

I found my peace. I have thrown away my worries. I have learned to forgive even those who persecute me, to be meek, gentle, tolerant to and of others.

A profound change has taken place in General Ponce Inrile. I hope to be in the Philippines shortly. I'm going to try and find out if it's possible to meet with him and learn a little more about this repentance.

Because repentance is something that has been forgotten in our preaching. Finally, story number four. And this story is set as a deathbed scene.

There are two principal players. One is the dying man. And the other is the monk who has been called at his request to deal with the agony of his soul as he goes to meet his maker.

If I'm not mistaken, it took place in the year 1492. The dying man is in his, I think was in his forties at the time. He was the most distinguished member of the de' Medici family in Florence.

Lorenzo, Lorenzo de' Medici. He was a soldier, a banker, a prince, a politician. You name it, he was it.

And the three sins particularly plagued him. He had sacked a nearby city called Volterra, that is he'd killed many of its inhabitants and razed it to the ground. He'd also robbed one of the orphanages under the church of some of its treasures.

And he had allowed a rival family to be practically exterminated when he could have stopped it. He had also robbed the citizens of Florence of their freedom and had constituted himself a dictator and kept them happy by throwing them feasts and entertainments and things like that. The other man was named Girolamo Savonarola, who was a Dominican monk who had arrived during the 1480s into Florence and had developed a preaching ministry such that half of Florence would hang on his words.

He was a prophet also. Accurately predicted the arrival of Philip of France in Italy, invading Italy. Actually predicted his arrival at the walls of Florence.

He himself went to him and said, we will receive you, that is Philip, if you come in peaceably. And when some of his soldiers started making trouble in Florence, he went to Philip of France and as a prophet of the Lord said to him, you must leave this place. You are allowing things here which should not take place and Philip of France retired with his army from Florence.

He was a man of God. Now, let me read the dialogue that takes place between them. This is recorded by Borellamacci, who was a contemporary or later, slightly later historian, Italian historian.

Lorenzo is dying and frightened. He asked what he shall do. So Savonarola replies, Lorenzo, be not so despairing, for God is merciful to you.

If you will do the three things I will tell you. Then said Lorenzo, what are these three things? The padre answered, the first thing I will tell you is that you should have a great and living faith that God can and will pardon you. To which Lorenzo answered, this is a great thing and I do believe it.

The padre then added, it is also necessary that everything wrongfully acquired should be given back by you insofar as you can do this and still leave your children as much as we'll maintain them as private citizens. These words drove Lorenzo nearly out of himself. But afterwards he said, this also will I do.

The padre then went on to the third thing and said, lastly, it is necessary that freedom and her popular government, according to Republican usage, should be restored to Florence. At this speech, Lorenzo turned his back upon him, nor ever said another word, upon which the padre left him and went away without other confession. Now, as we hear that story, there are several interpretations we could make of it.

Two are of importance to us as Christians, that is of theological importance. One is, is this man, this Savonarola, saying to the dying man, you must earn your salvation by doing certain things. Knowing a little about Savonarola, I would say, no, that is not what is happening.

What is happening concerns the nature of faith and living faith and a great and living faith. The padre said, the first thing that you must do is that you should have a great and living faith that God can and will pardon you. In Romans chapter 10, verse 10, we read about the kind of faith that saves, because there is a faith of the head and there is a faith of the heart, and these two are different.

Paul says, for it is with your heart that you believed and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess that you are saved. A heart belief is necessary for salvation and repentance is that which prepares the heart to believe. It is possible to believe with your head, but not with your heart.

So I'm going to talk in a few moments about the nature of repentance. Louis says, don't confuse repentance with disgust, for the one comes from the, he uses another word, but the devil, from God and the other from the devil. Finney defines it as a change of opinion respecting the nature of sin and this

change of opinion followed by a correspondent of change of feeling towards sin.

So I'm going to talk about what repentance is, then what the Holy Ghost does to enable you to repent, gives you a seeing that you've never had before, then I'm going to talk about the result of seeing as you've never seen something before, and that is you will have changed feelings or emotions, and finally, that there will be a radical shift of attitude, you'll have a changed heart towards the whole of life, towards everybody else, towards God, towards man, towards the nation, towards the gospel, towards hell, towards everything. But before we go on with the details of this, why don't we do that thing and stand up and turn around and sit down again. Let me pick up the threads where I left them.

The last story I told was about Savonarola, the prophet and monk and padre, and Lorenzo de' Medici, and it sounded as though Savonarola was saying, if you return things to Florence and if you give back the money you've stolen, then you can earn your forgiveness. And of course, that wasn't the case at all. He was aware that when a man truly repents, as distinct from merely acknowledging and feeling bad about his sin, then a living faith is born in that person's heart, a faith that is the sort of faith that will change their behavior and make it impossible for them to do anything else but give back the money they've stolen.

And that's a good thing for a human, because the person is changed in their hearts, because the faith is in their hearts and not just in their heads. Now, of course, you have to have a faith in your head to have it in your heart, but unless it gets from your head into your heart, and repentance is where that faith begins, and as faith deepens and deepens in the heart, it deepens and deepens in association with ongoing repentance. It is therefore very important that we understand what repentance is and how it works.

Let's begin with some biblical words about it. I've selected three, one from the New Testament, two from the Old Testament. The one from the New Testament is metanoia.

That's a Greek word commonly used to imply a change of mind or of understanding, relating both to sin and to God. It involves a turning from sin and a return to God. We could say that the turning from sin represents the repentance of sin.

The repentance and the turning to God completes the conversion, but these terms, if we define them a little too accurately, become confusing to us. Certainly, repentance initiates all sorts of things. Another Old Testament word, perhaps the commoner one, is shub.

It's a word with a similar meaning to metanoia, and this also implies turning away from and forsaking sin and turning towards God. But there's another very interesting Old Testament word, nacham. It's an Old Testament word with a root meaning of breathing deeply.

Derivatives of this word have to do with sorrow, regret, and comfort and consolation. The word is used more about God but also about man at times, and the associated ideas of sorrow and comfort are interesting. You'll notice in Colson's repentance, there was weeping followed by a sense of comfort.

They weren't tears of sadness or remorse nor of joy, but somehow tears of relief. For the first time in my life, I was not alone. He was becoming reconciled to God.

Now, it's interesting also that the word translated comfort in Isaiah 40, verse one, is from the same root as nacham, since the context has to do with the way God deals with sin. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she's received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

So perhaps we could say that biblical repentance begins with a radically changed understanding of God and sin and ends in consolation. Now, the second question concerns who does the repenting. That is to say, do I do it or does God do it in me? Does God do it for me? I preached once, I was expounding certain passages of Nehemiah years and years and years ago in Bolivia, South America, at a conference of student leaders from the whole continent.

And afterwards, a newly graduated theologian came to me fresh from seminary and said, look, you've got it wrong. Repentance is something that man alone does. Repentance is what you do, God has nothing to do with it.

It's what we do and God in response does something for us. Well, that certainly wasn't what happened to Colson. And I'm sure his repentance was real.

If you read it, the whole story, you'll read it just before that as Phillips was reading this chapter from Mere Christianity, Colson was seeing his life going before him and his whole body was getting hotter and hotter. The Holy Spirit was coming on him. I don't know what he believes exactly about the Holy Spirit.

Well, I'm sure he believes that there is one and that it was the prevenient work of the Holy Spirit that was taking place. But the Holy Spirit must have been on him at that point. And he was horrified.

He says it was painful period, agony period. He was seeing. Now we cannot see like that unless God, the Holy Spirit illumines our hearts.

When I saw that thing, when the curtain came aside, my heart perceived what judgment was all about. I'd understood it in my head, but when my heart grasped it, then I cried out, no, stop. And it wasn't that what Ezekiel was saying essentially this morning as he saw this.

He says, Lord, how long? It's got to stop. Are you going to blot the whole nation out? You don't respond like that when you see something in your head only. So Chuck didn't choose to repent.

If you judge by his description, repentance took over in his life. Is it then something I do? Do I have any part in it? Well, yes and no. Think of Peter addressing the crowd.

Peter says, repent. And that implies if you command somebody to do something, that they do it. Repent and be baptized.

But what has happened previously? The Holy Spirit has come upon them and they are convicted in their sin and they cry out, brethren, what shall we do? As a result of the operation of the Holy Spirit through those events, the speaking in tongues and through Peter's powerful address, they suddenly realize that they and the nation of whom they are a part are in an appalling situation. They've killed God's Messiah. And they say, what shall we do? And then he says, repent.

So repentance is what we do in relation to what the Spirit is doing. Every change that comes in a human life works like this. There's a marvelous article about it in one of the leadership magazines in the United States written by a very godly man.

He says, how does change in character take place? Well, he says, I won't go into all his explanation, it's a marvelous explanation, but it's as the Holy Spirit comes and shows us something, as we respond to that, so we are changed. Now, we have been presented very often with a gospel without repentance. That is to

say, a gospel which in its correct endeavor to emphasize the importance of faith in Christ has forgotten that living faith, heart faith in Christ arises out of a repentant attitude.

And that repentant attitude arises out of what the Holy Spirit has shown us about ourselves, about God, about the situation. And seeing that, we are distressed. Or seeing that sometimes, we are, as we perceive God's goodness, filled with great joy.

When you see something, you know, we've been given emotions for a reason. Emotions are bodily things. They're not, quote, psychological things.

If I suddenly yelled at you, your underarm deodorant would stop working. Your body would respond. Your pulse would begin to beat a little more.

Your heart would begin. Adrenaline would be pumping. A little of it was stirred up when I behaved a little crazily just now.

God has given us our emotions as that by which we gauge reality. Emotions, see, when you knock at the door of a young mother and say, I have bad news for you. Your little girl has just been knocked down by a lorry.

Her first words are, oh no, no, you must be mistaken. She cannot grasp the reality. But as she grasps the reality, the shock begins and the horror and the weeping and the desperation.

She is responding to reality, the reality of a child knocked down by a vehicle. Oh yes, sinners are going to hell. But what does it do to you? See, we don't perceive reality just with our brains.

We perceive reality with the totality of our being and particularly with our hearts. God desires to open these things to our hearts. And when our hearts see these things, our emotions respond, our body responds accordingly.

I was in by point. It will never fly. And we're so anxious to sort of, I don't know, process people into the church to increase our membership that we don't listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying.

We don't realize this part that God is playing in this and we shuffle them through, you know, okay, you're a sinner, yes, you see it, huh? Well, and then Jesus died for you, okay? And he blots out all your sins, okay? And then... So now you're a Christian, praise God, hallelujah. You're one of us. Now I'm caricaturizing it and I suppose that's not fair, but I'm doing so with a point.

We do not, we're not aware of that person as a person and the heart struggles. We don't attempt to find out what's going on. And most of all, we're not really aware of the Holy Spirit.

We're only hoping that he's blessing what we're doing. We don't look at such people with Christ's eyes of compassion. And we're more interested in a technique of doing it and getting them in than we are in a soul that is in darkness.

Now, God is merciful and through our bumbling, he saves many, but that doesn't excuse our bumbling. Now, where true, where the thing takes place as God intends it to take place, it will take place as a result of the Holy Spirit giving a totally new life to the world. A totally changed perspective.

Let me read for you the passage from Colson. He's an arrogant so-and-so at that point, ex-Marine who thinks he knows everything. And then as the book is being read, he says, I thought of an incident after the 1972 election when a reporter, an old Nixon nemesis, came by my office and contritely asked what he could do to get in the good graces of the White House.

I suggested that he try, quote, slashing his wrists, unquote. I meant it as a joke, of course, but also to make him squirm. Now, sitting there on the dimly lit porch, my self-centered past was washing over me in waves.

It was painful, agony. The Holy Spirit was showing him his past life as God saw it. And it was reaching his heart.

C.S. Lewis says, repentance is the process by which we see ourselves day by day as we really are, sinful, needy, dependent people. It is the process by which we see God as he is, awesome, majestic, and holy. And it so radically alters our perspective that we begin to see the world through God's eyes, not our own.

Repentance is the ultimate surrender of the self. There are two mirrors in which we can see ourselves, our own mirror and the mirror of God's eyes. And when we see ourselves reflected in the mirror of the eyes of God, we are appalled.

We are appalled. Are there examples of this in scripture? Well, we just quoted one. And Peter is preaching, and men crying out, and women, I presume, too.

Brethren, what shall we do in desperation? Read Nehemiah chapter eight. There's another example there. Their evangelistic technique is not very good.

Lines of them, because it's a large crowd and they've wanted to know the scriptures. And so Ezra is reading and giving a bit of explanation and the others are taking it up. And, you know, they don't have loudspeakers and I would imagine it's a mess.

But the Holy Spirit is there. And the people begin to weep because they are realizing how far they've departed from the law of Moses. And Nehemiah and Ezra think, oh, this is dreadful, they're weeping.

And they rush in among the people and say, stop weeping. We should rejoice because the word of God has come to us. And people do.

There's something funny, no, something marvelous about it when the Lord begins to reveal himself to her. Half the time you're weeping, half the time you've got such joy, you can hardly do anything. And it's not that you're unbalanced.

It's that for the first time in your life, you're entering into emotional health. Because emotional health is to be able to feel the extremes of what we were built to feel. The horror of sin and darkness.

The appalling sense of our sinfulness before God. But the wonder and gratitude and praise and thanksgiving and worship and joy as we see the love of God. We expand in our emotions, expand in our lives and in our living and become what we were created to be, human beings in the image of God.

We can weep more truly and laugh more heartily. And so there are emotions. And these are the effect of seeing.

God brings repentance to me often as I just wait in his presence and the Holy Spirit opens my eyes to certain things. Opens my eyes to truths which I thought I understood but understand as he does it for the first time. Sometimes I weep, sometimes I laugh.

He even told me a joke once. I was kind of striking a pose in prayer and he rapidly sketched a picture of himself big and august on a throne and a tiny little monkey parading in front of him. You see, humor is given to us to laugh at ourselves and I laughed at myself so much on that occasion.

It wasn't painful, it was funny. And every time I thought about it, I laughed. And when I tried to tell it to somebody else, they couldn't see the joke but I was laughing away.

So we're back again at this head knowledge and heart knowledge. The real knowledge we need is heart knowledge. Because it is heart knowledge that changes our lives.

You can know something in your head, you can know that Christ can deliver you. You can know that Christ is in you, in your head and yet your behavior doesn't change. Or if it does, it's just for a day or two and then you find you're getting back to where you were.

But in the degree that that knowledge gets into your heart and the door between your head and your heart opens, in that degree, your behavior begins to change. You begin to change. The deeper your heart grasp of reality, the greater the emotion surrounding that grasp, the more your behavior will be affected.

What is it that's critical to repentance? Is it the seeing of my sin? I don't believe so. Romans 2.4 tells us that it is the kindness of God which brings us to repentance. That's certainly how it works with me.

It's the heart knowledge of the love and kindness of God that awakens repentance. Paul writes, or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance. I think it's a French priest named Jean Lafrance who said, the discovery of your sin does not come from introspection, but from the contemplation of Christ on the cross.

I remember an occasion when my second son was off to Vancouver doing things he should not do. And I was fed up with the whole thing. Fed up because God wouldn't answer my prayers.

And I went into my study in the home we had then and behaved like a baby. I flung myself on the floor petulantly and thumped the floor with my fists and said, what kind of a father do you call yourself God? When you let me go through all these prayers and treat me like this. Now, I had no right to do that.

No right whatever, that was sin. That was a wrong attitude. But immediately the floor underneath me opened up and I was suspended over a beach and onto the beach came crashing green waves which I knew that I knew that I knew reflected the huge compassion of God towards me.

That broke me up. I was in rebellion. I was angry with him.

And he came against me with all his love and compassion. And I wept and I wept and I wept and I wept. How could he love me when I was doing that? Reese Howells describes his own conversion which took place not in Wales but in the United States of America.

And he's listening to Morris Rubin, a Jew who had been imprisoned, had been put in the mental hospital, all sorts of things because he'd accepted Jesus and said that he heard Jesus speaking to him. As Morris Rubin brought those sacred scenes that is of the cross before us. I too saw a bit of Jesus the cross.

It seemed I spent ages at the Savior's feet, and I wept and wept. I felt as if he had died just for me. I lost myself.

He broke me, and everything in me went right out to him." Phinney says the same thing. Phinney had discovered his sin, cast it aside, said, I will stand for you, Lord, and so on, in the woods alone. And there, really, I suppose, had his conversion to Christ.

But later, as he was in his office alone, the fire was burning brightly when this began, and it had become ashes when it ended. The risen Lord Jesus appeared to him. He said nothing, Phinney tells us, but looked at me in such a manner as to break me right down at his feet.

I wept aloud like a child and made such confessions as I could with my choked utterance. It seemed to me that I bathed his feet with my tears. It's not necessary to have manifestations of that sort to repent.

I think these are given us that we may have a clear picture in our mind of what causes the repentance. That is a heart vision of the Lord Jesus and his love. And sometimes it issues in joy.

One of my friends—I record the incident in a book called, written with Ken Blue, called Healing the Wounded. It's about church discipline. Had been disciplined by his church.

He was a Mexican guy, and he'd had a rotten life and been molested as a child and other things. But he'd learned how to bed women and had a very good technique for doing it and considered himself expert at it. Then the Lord got hold of him and he realized this was sin and tried to cast it aside, but his repentance was incomplete.

And though he rose in the church of which he was a member and taught young people, eventually he seduced one of the girls that he was teaching and knew that it was sin. And of course, because there had been previous incidents which had been dealt with in counseling and other things, he was disciplined and finally put out of the church because he had been in a position of leadership. Though the church was wise and kept visiting him and trying to help him, even though he was not allowed to attend the services.

Well, one day he was reading a chapter from Watchman Nee's book, The Normal Christian Life, when God got through to him about his love and grace and power. And he was standing in a line at the unemployment office when this happened. And as he waited for his turn, he kept smiling.

He was so filled with joy that he could not stop smiling. He was embarrassed because everybody he looked at either looked away from him or began smiling too. And when he got to the girl to explain whatever he had to explain to her, he did nothing but smile at her.

Finally, when the business was concluded, he ran to his car, slammed the door, locked it, and howled with joy. God, by his Spirit, wants to show our hearts things. And our bodies will respond.

Now, I think most of us have had some of this already. It's in some degree, but the more we wait in his presence, the more we allow God, by the Holy Spirit, to reveal ourselves to us, and himself to us, and his love to us. So our emotions will be affected.

Phinney says about this, in relation to God, the sinner feels towards sin as it really is. And here is the source of those gushings of sorrow. When he views it in relation to God, then he weeps.

When he views it in relation to God, when you see what you've done. Sometimes the Holy Spirit wakes me up in the night and says, you have grieved me. And I say, oh Lord, I'm sorry, what is it? Was it this? And there's a long pause and then, no.

Well, is it this? No. Then very gently and slowly, and I'll say to him, Lord, I don't want to grieve you, and it hurts me when I grieve you. Tell me what it is.

And he will tell me, I have the power of making God sad. I have the power of making God grieve. I said to him once, I don't want that power.

He said to me, if you don't have that power, then we don't have a relationship. And I was horrified. You have the power to make God grieve.

What are you doing with it? If the Holy Spirit illumines this in your heart, you'll weep. You'll say, oh Lord, I don't want to grieve you. And as you see his love coming to you, well, I never behave the same way.

Sometimes I weep, sometimes I laugh, I just adore him. Look, I'm a sinner, okay? I'm not a super saint. I'm just an ordinary sinner.

But the Lord reveals to me, as he wants to do to you, how he is and how he feels about you. And when he does, and this is what repentance is all about, it is the illumination of the Holy Spirit which makes us see sin, ourselves, the world around us, through his eyes. And above all, himself, his glory, his greatness, his love, his tenderness.

Now this will change our attitudes. There will be a radical shift in our attitude to the whole of life, as this takes place. Repentance is not the same as reformation.

You can reform your character by an act of will, but this is an exterior thing. The sin is still there, the sinful attitudes are still there. What God wants to do is to change us from within.

And in my case, that is an ongoing process. I list in the notes several changed attitudes. There's a changed attitude to hell and damnation.

I don't trust Finney's theology about many points, but he was a godly man, and when he talks about repentance, he knows what he's talking about because he's been through it. Changed attitude to hell and damnation, he says, the repentant person feels that it would be so right and so reasonable and so just for God to condemn him to eternal death, that so far from finding fault with the sentence of the law that condemns him, he thinks it is a wonder of heaven that God can forgive him. He is full of adoring wonder that he is not sent to hell.

Are you embarrassed when non-Christians say to you, surely a loving God wouldn't send people to hell? Do you find yourself unable to respond? Well, as the Lord gets hold of our hearts and reveals things to us, we change. Instead of thinking it hard or severe or unkind in God that incorrigible sinners are sent to hell, the repentant person is full of adoring wonder that he is not sent to hell himself and that this whole guilty world has not long since been hurled down to everlasting burnings. Another changed attitude is that there is a new fearlessness about the knowledge of one's sins becoming known.

I am not saying that we should display our sins to everybody or go into the horrendous details of our sin or anything like that, but for most of us our lives are... Well, if you think that somebody is going to find out

about that little thing that plagues you, you'd rather them not know it. In fact, you're afraid of being known. You're ashamed.

Repentance, as the Holy Spirit brings it to us, takes away that fear so that when it is appropriate, when we can say to people, look, yes, that was my problem too, but God has dealt with it and tell the story of God's grace to us in that and God's deliverance from it. Even the details don't bother us then. I've known that in individual people, seen the change, seen a man who was, you know, had molested small boys.

When God really dealt with him, he was a well-known figure, and as he was driving his car, after being caught and disciplined and being bitter with the church that disciplined him, as he was driving his car, he had a vision one day, three years later, of the holiness of God, and it blew his mind. He became manic, was admitted himself to a psychiatric hospital. He could not stand that vision of the holiness of God, then plunged into depression, then realized he must make amends for every sin in his life and began to write letters, even in his depressed state, to those he'd sinned against, and this was not merely an expression of his depression.

It was an expression of having seen the holiness of God. He wrote out his will, and then he discharged himself, still in that depressed state from hospital, and in the mercy of God was picked up by a church, the strangest church I've ever heard of, of mainly Chinese and blacks. I didn't know that was a combination, but anyway, they ministered the love of God to him, and he recovered, and one day he realized he must go back to that church, and though he couldn't put right what he'd done, at least expose himself to them all and say, look, I did this, and I'm sorry, and if you want to get at me or talk to me or do anything, I'm here and I want to make amends and tell you that I'm very, very sorry for what I've done.

It's a marvelous church. The elders called him after he wrote his letter and said, yes, it sounds like this is real. Well, come back, and they arranged a party for him, and they gave him a gold ring and a leather jacket, you know, like the prodigal returning, and as he faced the church and said his thing, he suddenly realized that he had no fear of doing so anymore, because he knew God had dealt with it.

That's what happens. I've talked about sins in my life when it's appropriate to do so and helpful to other people to do so, things of which I was utterly ashamed before that I didn't even want to mention the word. Repentance sets us free.

It's changed, our attitudes change. There's a new desire to make restitution, which that particular scientist had. The thief has not repented while he keeps the money he stole, and that was the lesson from Savonarola.

He knew that if Lorenzo was not willing to restore the liberty to the Florentines, then repentance had not take place, and he was lying when he said, or he was not understanding when he said he had a great and living faith that God would forgive him. When you have a great and living faith that God will forgive you, you either weep or rejoice or do a combination of the two, and you'll do anything. Salvation needs to proceed apace in our lives as the Holy Spirit opens our eyes and as we collaborate with what he's doing.

And there is a new hatred of sin. As long as we still love our sin, we've not truly repented. As long as it's a love-hate relationship, repentance hasn't proceeded.

Phineas says the individual who truly repents not only sees sin as detestable and vile and worthy of abhorrence, but he really abhors it and hates it in his heart. I remember once sinning in a particular room

and going to that room and hating the room, and I had to go around the room with the Lord and say, Lord, look at this wall. This wall saw what I did.

And as the sense of his pardon and cleansing came, so I was able to tolerate the very room again. There's one thing more that I want to say about this matter of repentance. Sometimes in seeking other kinds of experience, we are seeking them with unrepentant hearts.

I think, for example, of the healing of our emotions and the healing of memories. Now, I am fully aware of the value of what the Holy Spirit can do in restoring a memory, which is at the root of some difficult behavior, though the theology of it is such that it is only as we forgive the person who sinned against us and are able to receive God's forgiveness that that works. But often I've known people who come again and again for the healing of memories and who can sob and cry and do all sorts of things and then are not changed, and they want another do.

And so we go on and on and on and on, gathering prayer partners around them and going through this process again and feeling that somehow there must be something deeper, deeper, deeper. Well, there may be sometimes, but many times I have discovered that what is lacking is repentance in that person.

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