

# Corporate Confession and Repentance

by Richard Owen Roberts

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of corporate confession and repentance, honesty in speech, and remembering and telling the truth about God's mighty acts.*

**Duration:** 2:05:03

**Topics:** "Corporate Repentance", "Spiritual Revival"

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## Description

In this sermon, Richard Owen Roberts emphasizes the importance of collective humility and repentance within the body of Christ, calling believers to a unified acknowledgment of sin and a return to faithfulness. As a seasoned minister known for his prophetic voice, Roberts likely exhorts his listeners to confront the sins that have hindered their community's spiritual vitality and to seek God's merciful restoration. Through Scripture and personal conviction, he guides the congregation in a journey of corporate confession, highlighting the need for believers to stand together in repentance and humility. By doing so, Roberts encourages the church to experience the reviving power of God and to be renewed in their passion for holy living.

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## Transcript

As always when we have a gathering like this and we bring in a speaker, there's expenses too that need to be taken care of. And while we believe God, there's not going to be a possibility of choosing to work through us. And we come to you this afternoon and we're going to ask you to help with an offering for our speaker, for his expenses.

It was suggested that we ought to have time for questions and answers. And knowing myself, I might talk right up till the end. And because I really wouldn't be interested in entertaining questions about anything other than the subject of Canada, I'm going to make the following suggestion.

This is not a regular service by any speck of imagination. This is a special gathering of earnest people to take up earnest issues. If there are any questions you would like to ask, why not ask them while we're going along? Feel that liberty, would you? Obviously, I want to jump your feet and interrupt me, but someone might consider you impolite if you did that.

But wave your hand, feel good for life. Or if I don't see it, stand if you need to and wave your hand. But I'm quite serious now.

If there's any questions that you feel are pertinent to what has been said and that would be helpful for others as well, don't you hesitate to ask. And let's just keep it within the framework of the Bible and our concern together to see that the obstacles to the work of God's grace and homage are removed. Now, I want to ask you to turn backward into the book of Joel, and I want, in a relatively brief span of time, to discuss with you the issue of the Sovereign Assembly as it's featured in that particular book.

And as you're turning to it, may I indicate to you how this subject of the Sovereign Assembly seems to have been lost to a very significant degree to the Church of this century. It's a pinnacle thing, but nonetheless true. If you are one who loves American history, you are aware, and I made a small allusion to this this morning, that you are aware that the Sovereign Assembly was a very prominent part of the spiritual life of this nation.

Long before it became a nation, but during the colonial period in New England, Sovereign Assemblies were very, very commonly held. And then, as I did mention as well, even at the time that the founding fathers were putting together the constitutional documents, they met in the Sovereign Assembly. But one of the latest significant Sovereign Assemblies on record was at the time of the Civil War, when the Congress again adjourned and went together to church in the Sovereign Assembly.

And if you're interested, where is Reuben? Is he here? Among the books, I think, that Reuben has to offer for sale is a little pamphlet called *The American Vine*. And it's a sermon that was delivered at the Sovereign Assembly in connection with the Civil War. And I'm certainly not knowledgeable about the Civil War, and I certainly have no interest in getting off on the subject of American history, but it would appear to me a perfectly wonderful thing that the nation, despite that terrible upheaval at that time, was preserved intact.

And I have the conviction that God himself responded to those who called upon him during that dark season. And although the war occurred and the terrible tragedies of it, nonetheless, the nation was preserved as one nation under God. So what I'm saying is that up until that time, there was this very long history, 200 years approximately of time, in which Sovereign Assemblies were very, very frequent occurrences.

Now, they were not something that was done as a routine. It was not as if they had their annual Sovereign Assembly. These Sovereign Assemblies were called in a very careful fashion.

In those days, Christian leaders saw a hand with God more readily in the affairs of men than we do in our day. It's strange, isn't it, that we can have the very early death of a very prominent leader, things to say, let's ask God if there's meaning or significance in his death. We can have these tremendous natural calamities of which I spoke this morning, and we pride ourselves in getting through them successfully.

But I don't hear anybody saying to the nation, let's call upon God and ask him what he's saying to us in these frequent and distressing circumstances of fire and flood and hurricane and so on. But in the earlier years of our nation, whenever anything out of the ordinary occurred, there may be three young men who drowned in a boating accident, maybe an earthquake in the city of Boston, maybe a fire in Philadelphia. When something out of the ordinary occurred, the first thing, it seems, that the godly leadership thought to do was to call the people together to inquire of the Lord what he was saying.

Now, we're so far removed from that that even when you say, the Lord is speaking to us, people will sort of scratch their brows and say, where did this weirdo come from? In a sense, when does God speak through

things like this? So we've had a complete reversal in this whole world. As I implied, the subject of the Solemn Assembly itself seems to have fallen into almost total oblivion in this century. Now, I hope I'm wrong in what I'm about to say, but I personally am unaware of any Solemn Assemblies called any time between 1900 and 1980.

Now, I hope I'm wrong. I'd like to think I'm very wrong. But I'm not so wrong that what none of you are going to be able to prove me wrong.

I mean, the likelihood of it is virtually non-existent. Almost everywhere I have said anything about the Solemn Assembly in recent years, people have said, what is that? I never heard that. And even those who have heard of it may be thinking of something quite different, of what the Scripture said for it and what our forefathers said.

So I want to talk to you, not the whole afternoon, but for a brief period, about the Solemn Assembly and utilizing the book of Job. And I think it might help us to see the kind providences of God in these matters. Now, I don't recall the time frame exactly, but I'm going to guess about 16 years ago.

A church in the area where I live asked me if there was any way that I could come to a series of Sunday night meetings. And they requested that I come four Sunday nights in a row. But it wasn't possible, as I recall, to do Sunday nights in a row during the month of January.

And the first two Sundays, after I had spoken each time, I really felt sick in my heart. When they invited me, they made it clear that they needed a word from the Lord. And I really didn't sense that I had any word from the Lord.

And that really grieved my heart. And I expected to grieve them, too, though they were gracious enough not to upbraid me concerning the matter. But the third grasp was approaching.

And as I looked over the week, I realized that it was an extremely dizzy week. And that I had virtually every moment of the week committed, with the exception of Thursday, where I had a considerable block of time. But I had given all of our employees something else to do out of the office that day.

And that left me there alone in the office. And yet that was the only period of time that I could see that I could do anything at all by way of earnest preparation. And so, early Thursday morning, I said, Now, Lord, I don't ever remember praying this before, but will you see to it that nobody comes anywhere near the office? Now, though we have a bookstore, I mean, when you're asking God to send you more customers, it's not quite the wrong way of proceeding.

But, oh, Lord, don't let the phone ring, either. Just give me a day that I can be alone with you. It's my only hope for such a man.

And the Lord heard and answered that prayer that lovely day. With one exception, the postman came in, plopped the mail on the desk, and went out. But other than that, I didn't see a soul.

And I never had any phone to answer, or any interruption that time. So as I was seeking some word from the Lord, some sense of direction, some help, for Sunday night, I was led to the Book of Joel. And for the first time in my life, though I had read it many times, and I went and preached that Sunday night from the Book of Joel.

I reported this morning what happened. The church called and someone said that the elders avenged a terrible wrong that had been committed. But I began to understand at that time this matter of corporate shame and corporate repentance.

Now let me read this, not in the sense of a straightforward reading, but what used to be called a Bible reading. I'll just repeatedly interrupt myself with comments. Joel chapter 1, verse 1. The word of the Lord.

The King of Joel, the son of Bethuel. Hear this, O elders. And this is all the intelligence of a man.

Has anything like this happened in your days, or in your father's days? Tell your sons about it. Let your sons tell their sons, and their sons the next generation. Joel is about to describe a righteous judgment from God that takes on two forms.

The most obvious form is this plague of locusts. I don't think anyone knows for sure whether what is described in verse 4, the dawning locust, the swarming locust, the creeping locust, the stripping locust, whether that's four separate invasions of insects, or the same army of insects at various stages of their development. But Joel has just said, I'm going to tell you about something, which you don't know anything like it that has ever happened.

You don't have any records of an incident of this magnitude. Nor will there ever again be anything to be compared with this. This invasion of locusts, the drought that accompanied it, and the solemn assembling that followed.

Now, just to help us to keep perspectives correct, the subject of locusts is certainly not one that most of us have delved into, nor are we total strangers to. Here in our own nation a few years ago, there was the beginnings of a major locust invasion, and 10 or 12 of the western states were reporting the density of these insects. I don't recall any of the figures exactly, but there were areas where there were 12 insects per square foot, and other areas with 14 or 15, even 18 insects per square foot.

But you can't compare an invasion of 18 insects per square foot with what Joel is describing. There are records of invasions of locusts, which have been put into print, which are utterly astonishing. For instance, there was a period of two days and two nights, in which neither the sun was seen, nor the moon, nor stars, nor sky, because there were insects patching overhead steadily for 48 hours.

There's another record of a plague of locusts, where they covered an area of 2,000 square miles, and they were seven inches deep underground. Still another incident, where there was this horrendous invasion of insects, and they devoured everything in sight as they moved along, and then a wind arose, and they were blown into the sea, and they drowned in the sea, and the waters of the sea rolled them up on shore in great mounds, where their carcasses rotted, and some 2,000 people died of a plague that emanated out of those rotting carcasses. But Joel is describing something worse than it will go.

What the non-locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten. And what the creeping locust has left, the stricken locust has eaten.

Many of us are aware of the fact that one of the greatest grievances that God had with his people in the past, and I believe still has, is our poor memory. Now, I don't mean that we've only poor things to remember. I mean we can't remember the great things that God has done for us.

We had a situation in our own family which came to me as a terrible, terrible rebuke. Three or four years ago, we were faced with the greatest financial crisis of our lives. And the whole family just met together and prayed and sought the face of God.

And within hours, when we were right on the verge of being driven into bankruptcy by someone else's error, right on that verge, the only wealthy man in the world that I could call out of the woods, and he said to me, I understand you're faced with an emergency. I said, yes. He said, what is the extent of it? I said, I must have \$200,000 tomorrow, or I'll be forced into bankruptcy.

And he said, you now have \$200,000. It was a long but mildly grateful. And then I went back to the family and circled and recorded.

And we did that. The very next day, I had a pair of muscles in my hands. Why, we all just about let down our skin with joy and thanksgiving.

Maybe eight, ten days later, a very small problem arose in our office. And I said, I don't know what we're going to do. I don't see how we're going to handle this.

And my son said, Dad, where is your memory? Have you forgotten already what God just did for us? And to my shame, I am. Isn't that the way many of us are? We have from God the most glorious benefits. They haven't even grown cold in our hands, and we've forgotten.

And God was calling Israel for this and saying in verse 3, Tell your sons about it. Let your sons tell their sons and their sons, the next generation, But dear brothers and sisters, doesn't it cause you merely to weep with sorrow when you stop to think what it is you've got to tell to your sons? And they to their sons. And the next generation, I mean there are Christian people who if they were going to tell their sons the greatest thing that ever happened to them in all their life, could tell about the time they won first prize in the county fair for the biggest challenge.

Most of us have seen so little of the mighty acts of God that we invent things, much of what's reported by way of miracles, no miracle at all. I was in a funny mood one day at our office and warehouse somehow. I got it in my head that I had to climb up on top of the tallest ladder in our warehouse and bring down 60 boxes of books that had been stored at the top level at 16 feet.

I don't know what possessed me to think I had to do it that day. I had to do it all alone, but I was sure I had to get that job done. So I got this big ladder and I leaned it up against these pallet racks and I went to the very top and in order to reach the 16 foot level I had to stand on the top of this ladder and I got a hold of one of these big boxes and I don't know now what it weighed, but I would guess somewhere around 70 to 80 pounds and I couldn't get my arm all the way around it.

But I got my arm part way around it and I swung it off of the pallet rack and there I was tottering on the top of this ladder and suddenly off my leg. And the moment later I stood shaking in my shoes and wondering if I was dead or alive and saying, well, this is incredible. Everything seems to work.

Nothing seems to be broken. I landed on my feet. Wow! Well, there you have a miracle.

So I rushed right into the office and I said to myself, Bob, the most incredible thing has happened. You know that big ladder? Well, yes. Well, you know those counters up on the ceiling level? Yes.

Well, I was startled. You were what? Dad, whatever made you think you ought to bring those down? Oh, I said, just something your old father got this day. Well, he said, what happened when I said I fell off the top of the ladder? I hurt.

No. He said, the angels must have warned you about that. My wife came here and I said, Maggie, the most wonderful thing happened, an amazing miracle.

And I exclaimed into her ear, praise the Lord. That night, when I was getting ready for bed, I took off a heavy sweater I had worn all day and was quite astonished to see a huge rip in the back of that sweater. It troubled me.

I wonder how that's happened. And I thought it was a good sweater when I put it on. Then I took off my shirt and there's another big rip.

I surely couldn't put on two torn garments in one day. And then I took off my undershirt and it tore in the same place. So I backed up to a mirror and there's a long scratch down my back.

I wonder when all that happened. So, I went to bed saying, well, first thing in the morning I've got to go back to the scene and try to understand what occurred. Well, indeed, let me tell you what happened.

I had a small scratch on my hand. I had been aware of that, but I hadn't figured it out either. But when I went back and stood there in the warehouse where I had fallen, I realized that when I began to topple, just before I fell, I reached out to grab something.

But I was up above everything but the box. There was these pallet racks. You know what pallet racks are, these large metal racks? It went up only to 12 feet.

And then there was a platform at that 12 foot that ran up to the 16 foot level. As I fell, I realized I had tried to grab something, had gotten a hold of one of these rough metal tops of the pallet rack. That had swung me around a corner, and there in this corner were a whole series of wooden uprights that we use for shelving, where there are pegs all the way down.

And we build massively, we have miles and miles of shelves in our warehouse. When we build these massive racks of shelves, the shelves sit on these wooden pegs. And what I realized was I had swung around the corner, landed on these shelves that were leaning against the wall.

The pegs had caught hold of my clothing and let me down gently like an elevator. But you see, I had told my son it was a miracle. Then I had to get along with my wife and say, Did I honor you by calling it a miracle? What if the world had lied? I called that a miracle.

And I realized if I exaggerate what God has done, that is not His glory. It's as bad to exaggerate as to understate. When we speak of the mighty acts of God, we ought to speak honestly and correctly.

I came to realize I had a marvelous providential deliverance. The Lord Himself kept me from serious injury. But it was not a miracle.

A miracle requires a suspension of God's own laws of nature. There was no suspension of laws of nature. There were no angels there that tore me out.

In the providence of God, I reached out. I got hold of the provident ballot rack that swung me around the corner. I slid down these boards on the tables.

What a great thought! My, I'm grateful that it happened that way. And I'm telling you the power of the Bible. We call things miracles when there is an invention and a suspension of God's laws of nature.

And we ought to revise our vocabulary and our speech. And we ought to speak with honesty. God doesn't give glory to something that I've exaggerated.

God is the God of truth. Now, here, Job requires these people to tell not something they imagined, but something that really happened. And to tell it in such a way that subsequent generations could not forgive it.

And I'm saying to you that often, because we do exaggerate so closely, God does not step in and act mindfully. And so we are left with nothing but cabbages to talk about. We return best to be honest before our God, I believe of.

Look at verse 5. Awake, drunkards! Beware, all you wine drinkers, on account of the sweet wine that is cut off from you now. Now, that we might almost treasure, we might almost look forward to a time when times were so devastating, when food supply so scarce, when crops so despoiled that the drunkard had no wine to drink. It's a remarkable occasion, isn't it, when the first lament that's recorded is a lament of the drunkard who can't find any wine.

That's not where it ends. That's only where the account begins. For a nation, verse 6, has invaded my land, ninety and without number.

Its teeth are the teeth of a lion, and it has the fangs of a lion. Did you ever examine carefully the locust, or even a picture of a locust? It was a very accurate description. It has made my vine waste and my fig trees winter.

It has stripped them bare and cast them away, their branches have become white. Just envision this language that the prophet is utilizing here. Oh, how graphic and clear it is.

Can't you envision one of these mountain sides tomorrow morning covered with billions and billions of locusts in the morning? It is black with their presence, but by night they have stripped every leaf, every inch and part, every small twig, every minor branch, so that by nightfall there is nothing but the stark white of the occasional truncated branch that we would call it. What's that book in verse 8? The sick will, like a virgin, girded the sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth. Oh, what touching language.

Let me tell you how I see it. I am picturing in my mind right now a lovely girl in your church, Mary, sweet Mary, ready to marry the gold-silver diamond, so earnest that she'll marry God's man. In all congregations pray, Oh God, keep this sweet virgin for the right man.

Don't let some foul fellow touch her. And then in God's gracious providence the hour comes when the young man arrives on the scene, and at first glance everybody says, He's just the love we've been praying for. And with every passing meet the evidence mounts up, here is the perfect couple, and finally the engagement is announced, and then the wedding day.

And behold, the congregation comes to celebrate this glorious act of God in bringing them together. They meet in the front of the church, and the ceremony proceeds, and the vows are taken. And then they have a reception, and Carl is parked out on the highway in front of the church.

This dear young man helps his beloved into the passenger seat, and he walks around behind the car, and opens the door to enter the car himself. And a wild raging youth comes tearing down the highway, scrapes along the side of this car, crushes the light out of this movie bed. And this virgin is bereft of a husband.

Oh, you know what her pain is like. Can't you almost hear it even now as I speak? Can't you feel the heartbreak of that entire congregation? Hear these words again, Well, like a virgin girded with sackcloth, For the bridegroom, the grain offering, And the libation are cut off from the house of the Lord, The priest mourn, minister to the Lord, The land mourns, for the grain is ruined, The new wine dries up, fresh oil fails. Be ashamed, O Father's will, Oh, vine dressers, For the wheat and the barley, Because the harvest of the field was destroyed, The vine dries up, and the fig tree fails, The pomegranate, the balsam, the apple tree, All the trees of the field dry up, Indeed, rejoicing dries up from the sons of men.

The door, and the flames of the world, Gird yourselves with sackcloth from the mantle of priests. Well, O ministers of the altar, Come steady tonight in sackcloth, O ministers of my God, For the grain offering and the libation are cut off from the house of your God, Consecrate the past, call a solemn assembly, Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land, To the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord, Alas, for the day, For the day of the Lord is near, And it will come as destruction from your mighty, As that food that cut off from before our eyes, Gladness and joy from the house of our God, The seeds shrivel under the clouds, The storehouses are desolate, The barns are torn down, The graves dried up, Oh, how the beasts of the field wander aimlessly, They corrode, there's no pasture for them, Even the flock of sheep suffer, The fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, And the flame has burned up all the trees of the field, Even the beasts of the field can't redeem, For the water drops are dried up, The fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, Well, the trumpet's in time. Sound an alarm in my holy mountain, Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, For the day of the Lord is coming, Surely it is near.

Now, strangely, Many who have read these chapters and interpreted them have somehow seen two separate incidences described here. And honestly, there are the most astonished interpretations given to these two chapters that one could possibly imagine. I hope I don't sound arrogant in saying to you that chapters 1 and chapter 2 all the way through verse 27 are speaking of the very same event.

They're both describing that which Joseph was beyond anything that had ever happened before. Notice now how in verse 2 he comes at the description from a different perspective than he did in chapter 1. These words, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of cloud and thick darkness, As the dawn is spread over the mountains, So there is a great and mighty people. There has never been anything like it, Nor will there ever be again to the years of many.

I want to picture it now in my own words. All around you are gorgeous mountains. For some years I pastored a church down here in Portland, in Oregon.

And from the home where I lived, I could look out and behold glorious mountains on three sides. And not third, but the one I saw to the east. And this is what I. G. A. Joel is describing here in chapter 2. In the morning when these people arise and look out on the hills, they're aware that the hills seem to be somehow a mask of blackness.

The great darkness just covers the whole of the hill. But as the day dawns and the morning advances, they realize that this is not just the phenomena created by clouds and sun, but indeed there are gathering on the mountain sides an entire army, a vast army, an innumerable army, not of soldiers, but of locusts, an army so vast and great that has never been the likes before, nor will there ever be again unto many generations. A fire, he says in verse 3, consumes before them, and behind them a flame burns.

The land is like the garden of desolate wilderness behind them. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like war horses, so they run. The noises of cannons, they leap from the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of the flame of fire consuming the stone, like a mighty people raised from death.

Before them, now get this, before them the people are in danger. For after all, in this assembly of people there are young, but there are also old. There are those that have heard these crackling sounds before, that have heard the advance of an army of this kind on other occasions, they have become perceptive as the mountain blackened.

They begin to say, oh no, not this, not this, surely, not this, oh, where did God, it was not locusts gathering there, by the billions, but as the noise begins, and as the movement commences, and the whole army is advancing toward them, and the prophet says, the people are in danger, and with all patience turn them in. But on the army comes, he says, they run like ninety men that climb the walls, like soldiers, they each march in line, or do they deviate from the path? They do not crowd each other, they march everyone in his path. When they burst through the defenses, they do not break ranks, they rush on the city, they run on the wall, they climb into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief, oh yes, these people have pulled the shutters tight, and they have done everything in their power to keep the insects out, but on and on, through the cracks in the shutters, even eating the carpets off the floor, the draperies in the house, the shoes off the floor.

Before then the earthquakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness, and the Lord offers his voice before his army. Surely his camp is very great, for strong is he who carries out his word. The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome.

Now, friend, I have spoken to you already about the righteous judgments of God, and I need to say to you that there is a great deal of misinformation and confusion that seems to permeate much of the church on this subject. When the word judgment is utilized from the pulpit, there seem to be always some who suppose that what the creature is talking about is something yet in front of us, something down the road, what we would call technically eschatological judgments, judgments to come, great white-throat judgments, or the judgments of worse. But now get this clear.

When I'm speaking to you about the righteous judgments of God, I'm not talking about something in the future. I am talking about the here and the now. There are preachers who have said to me, if we're not careful, God may judge us.

Since when are the judgments of God iffy or uncertain? God judges sin as it occurs. God is never targeted in His judgments. God hasn't taken our court system as His example.

We ought to take His court system as our example. If I sin today and do not judge myself, God brings me under judgment today. Have you let that principle stay? If I sin today and don't judge myself, and God judges me, it is then imperative that my church judge me quickly.

And if I am part of a church that won't judge me quickly, then God judges the church just as He's judged me. And the sin of the individual becomes the sin of the whole body. Have you let that stay? I repeat, God is never targeted in His judgments.

We have powerful examples in Scripture, for instance, David, of whom I spoke this morning. Some read the account of David's sin with Bathsheba, and the subsequent murder, and they say, by God, let David get away with that sin for months. Nine months, at least, before England confronts them.

You are a poor reader if you read that conclusion. The very day David sinned and would not judge himself, God brought him under judgment. He describes the judgment in Psalm 32.

He describes himself as being in a parched wilderness, describes his flesh as withered, his bones as broken, his lips as parched, a wilderness experience. Now, I don't know what it's like in your church, Pastor, but believe me, I have been in a large number of churches where the majority of people were living in wildernesses. Time after time, people have said to me, well, I used to love the prayer meeting.

I used to study my Bible every day. I used to witness. I used to love the Lord.

They say all that as if they don't know what happened to them. Well, in case you don't know what happens to people in that circumstance, let me tell you, God judges them. If I sin and won't judge myself, God will invariably step in and judge me.

Let somebody in their mind protest and say, Mr. Roberts, Mr. Roberts, Mr. Roberts, you can't be that dumb. God hasn't judged people like that. It's a lie! Demonstrating that you don't understand the judgment of God.

You see, there are two basic judgments. And again, I remind you, I'm not speaking of the future. There are two judgments that accompany sin as it occurs, either one of which God is at liberty to utilize.

The first of these judgments we call, technically, remedial. The second we call final. Let me explain the difference.

In remedial judgment, God brings something to pass in the person's life or in the life of the entity that causes them to realize they have sinned against God, that they are out of His favor, that they are under His wrath. Something that is, as I said, remedial. That is to say, it is corrective.

It is designed to turn them around. We read Isaiah 63 and 64. We did not read in those two chapters that God said to the Philistines, You help yourself.

Israel is yours. And put them to death. We didn't read anything like that.

No, instead we read God turned Himself and became their enemy. God turned them over to their own sins. God allowed their hearts to be hardened.

God did not stir up His strength and come and say, God restrain His compassions toward them. Remedial judgment. I described when I began this afternoon the situation that has existed in America in earlier years.

The sudden death of three young men drowned in a boating accident. And the call to a solemn assembly to inquire, What is God saying to us? An earthquake in which nobody dies but the whole place is shaken.

What is God saying to us time after time after time In fact, when these phenomena occurred, they inquired of the Lord.

Lord, what do you say? And they did so with this significant understanding. A remedial judgment left unheeded will in the course of God's time turn into a final judgment. Let me repeat that.

A remedial judgment left unheeded will in the course of God's time become a final judgment. You say, well, what is a final judgment? A final judgment is a judgment in which there is neither time nor opportunity given for repentance. Could you name a final judgment in the New Testament? Yes, many of you respond immediately.

Ananias and Sapphira. Did Peter say to Ananias, Oh, what you've done is grievous, didn't he? The Holy Spirit is so upset by your action. Now I want you to understand, you see that door over there, Ananias? Go through that door and there's the prayer room over there.

I want you to go and see If you can't find strong grounds of repentance, is that what he was told? No, indeed he wasn't. This is your lie. You have lied against the Holy Ghost.

And down he goes in death. And shortly thereafter, his time, the same way. Final judgments, remedial judgments.

You see, people say if we're not careful, God may judge us. It appears that for the most part, at least, they're thinking of final judgments. And God could, but how much trouble would it be for God to drop the whole of this continent into the sea? How long would it take? He wouldn't even have to use his thumb.

God has only to live a thing when it comes to that. But God is not anxious to send final judgments. How many psalms are there that specialize in statements about God's love and kindness and God's love and suffering? When I was a boy, I was raised in a church that read the psalms and sang the psalms.

And I remember well those Sundays when almost as a glorious champ we would work our way through a song and a preacher reading the statement of a terrible offense and the congregation reading the statement of God's love and kindness. God is in no hurry to destroy. God is not anxious to eliminate you or me, I'm thankful to say, or this nation.

God sends remedial judgments ordinarily first. But if left unheeded, I repeat, they become final judgments. Now, who died in this account of joy? How many suddenly perish? There's no record of any death.

None whatsoever. Their food supplies were exhausted. Their conveniences and pleasures were cut off.

Their lives were extremely difficult. But God, in this remedial judgment of play, had brought the opportunity of repentance. And I love Joel and choose Joel to speak to concern this afternoon because it's a glorious example of a people who saw the hand of God and interpreted correctly the events of their time and sought God's favor.

And as I said this morning, it is true that it is to me and no doubt to many of you that in our day we see the signs when we interpret them falsely. Now, some foolish people have read Joel 1 and 2 and have somehow managed to turn around what is said and make it something that has to do with eschatology. I pity them.

I wonder where their hearts are at. This pair of chapters is dealing, as I said already, through verse 27, with one terrible, terrible judgment sent from God to which God's people responded aright. But let's take just a few moments now to focus on the response.

Verse 12, Yet even now declares the Lord, He can't leave those for Himself, can He? He's not returned to me with weeping and mourning. But He's returned to me with all the power and the weeping, fasting, mourning. Men, you're out.

And out you go. Now I'll return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness and relenting to evil. Who knows whether He will not turn and relent, leave a blessing behind Him, even a great offering and a libation for the Lord your God.

Lord your God. With fasting, weeping, mourning, not yet returned. He's gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness and relenting to evil.

Who knows whether He will not turn and relent and leave a blessing behind Him, even a great offering and a libation consecrated by Him, for prayer and solemn service. And I told you already, these words were taken seriously by our Father. This nation became a great nation because whenever there was some evidence of God's displeasure, the spiritual leaders called the nation to fasting and prayer.

And now the spiritual leaders often don't even know anything at all. I meet with men who tell me that we're in the midst of the greatest revival in the history of the world, and they say it with utter sincerity and stupidity. They think because they've got 15,000 people attending their services that they're in the midst of revival.

And they never noticed that the devil was in the back applauding during the whole thing. And it never occurred to them to wonder why the 15,000 people know nothing about transformed blood or Holy Spirit power or the beauty of holiness. But let's be direct and plain now.

Has your church called a solemn assembly? What's a solemn assembly like? Well, the basics are laid out here. You gather all the people together. Now, I don't know about your church.

I do know that in most churches a solemn assembly is defeated before it starts because you can never get all of it. Imagine it. Now, here are two pastors on the front row.

Imagine commanding the presence of every person and every person saying, Yes, Pastor, you'll be there. I thank God for those churches where pastors have some authority. But I'm going to tell you very plainly, and this is a little off my subject, but I didn't get it in my mind, and I'm going to say it.

I think a lot of pastors have destroyed their own usefulness. They want everybody to think of them as just one good son. Don't call me Mr. Roberts.

Call me Dick. When I come around, don't expect to see me dressed in a way that marks the fact that I'm a servant of the living God. I'm in my overalls.

I glad-hand the people. And when I preach a serious sermon, I stand at the door and say, Don't believe anything I said. I want you to know I'm just doing my job, but I'm just a real guy.

Over and over, I see men destroy their authority as a pulpit and then complain because people don't respect them. Before solemn assemblies can be really meaningful, we've got to have pastors of such

stature before God that they can issue commands from the throne and the people know it's not a blabbermouth pastor And when Job called the people together, they came. If you study the subject of solemn assemblies in his scriptures, you'll see over and over, the people came.

And the people sanctified themselves. They gathered the elders, verse 16. They gathered the children and the nursing infants.

There are multitudes of churches that can't hope to see God do anything significant because a major portion of their congregation is in junior church. All the kids are out of the service and a significant number of the leaders are out of the service, messing around with the kids. The kids ought to be in the solemn assembly.

Does he say, Have a nursing for the infants? No, he says, Let the mother come with the nursing infant at her breast. When the solemn assembly is called, all are to be present. Verse 16, Let the bridegroom come out of his room and the bride out of her bridal chamber.

Can you imagine? The honeymoon was revoked. They were given more honeymoons in those days. So that's to maybe a year.

But our beloved ones, it was revoked. They were required to be present. Oh, for a church where when a call to solemn assembly is issued, everybody comes.

And Pastor, if you know good and well that you issued a solemn assembly call and everybody wouldn't come, I'd work in the direction of ridding the church town of those that care. One of the greatest revivals that could happen to an awful lot of churches is what we used to call a backdoor revival. When a lot of people who have no love of God, but they love authority and control, get so angry at the gospel that they leave it.

Now, I've never seen it or heard it. But many of them have heard the gospel for 40 or 50 years and have never bent low in what it's called. Why should we allow this stubborn group of people in their 60s and 70s and 80s and even 90s often rule the church of God and keep the spirit of God out? If you'd be, I would drive them out with the gospel acts.

But I would prefer them to stay and to get right with God. And I would be unwilling if I were a pastor to let a handful of unrepentant people prevent the spirit of God from doing a mighty work. Let the priests, the Lord's ministers, weep between the corpse and the altar.

And let them say, spare thy people, O Lord. And do not make thine inheritance a reproach. Now, dear brothers and sisters, that's where we're at.

God's inheritance in America is a reproach. His name has become a binding among the nations. The wicked in our day look at the shriveling, snot-nosed church and laugh.

Many times I've heard them say, I've let it in pitch. Christianity is dead. Their old Puritan ethics will never, ever raise their head and interrupt our lifestyle again.

We want the battle. The church has let the world win. There was a time when the church influenced the world for good.

When the world didn't dare do certain things except at night and behind closed doors. But now it's the world that influences the church for evil. There's much more of the world in the church than there is of the church in the world.

I have often said in meetings like this, and I mean this exactly as I stated, the negative influence of millions and millions of people who call themselves Christians and are not is vastly greater than the positive influence of a handful of true believers. Every time we add another false convert to the ranks, we strengthen the hand of the devil and we give the world another cause to celebrate. And where does it begin? It begins with the priests of our ministry.

Weeping between the courts and the altar, and crying, saying, Spare thy people a while. Don't make thy inheritance a reproach. Why should those number of people say there is their God? Verse 18, Then the Lord will be jealous for his land.

And we'll have pity on his people. And the Lord will answer and say to his people, Behold, I'm going to send you grain and wine and oil, and you'll be satisfied and full with them. And I will never again make you a reproach among the nations, but I will rebuke the northern army and its vanguards into the eastern sea and its rear guard into the western sea.

Remember that plague of locusts I described, where a wind arose and blew them into the sea? And billions and billions of carcasses of dead insects washed up on the shore? Our land has been swept with evil in a degree rarely compared with Joel's description of the invasion of Earth. But the very God that drove those insects into the sea could cause even today its great breath to rise in this region. And before nightfall, the evil could be blown away.

Do not fear, O Adam. Rejoice and be glad, for the Lord has done great things. Do not fear.

Peace to the field, to the pastures, to the wilderness of Timbergreen, for the tree has borne its fruit. The fig tree and the vine have yielded in full. So rejoice, O sons of Zion.

Be glad in the Lord your God. He has given you the early rain for your invocation. He has poured down for you the rain early, and the land and the threshing floors will be full of grain.

I will make up for you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the creeping locust, the stripping locust, the gnawing locust, my great pardon me, which I sent among you. Dear friends, I hope you're not among those silly people who read this passage and join the latter rain denomination, or make some silly fuss about early and latter rain. Here's a passage that hangs together.

These people have experienced the most awful plague of locusts in human history, and a tragic drought that accompanied it, and God says, I am going to respond to your solemn assent. I have heard you, and my heart is gladdened by what I have seen. Your tears have not been shed in vain.

Your wails have not missed my attention. I am aware of your grief. When you issued the call to the solemn assent, and demanded the presence of all, the call came.

I have already sent early rain, and I am going to send now quickly another great rain. I have bought my slum to beat it down. Hunger and this terrible destruction that you've experienced is going to pass quickly.

The crops are going to come out with tremendous rapidity. You are going to have more foodstuff than you've ever enjoyed before. I am going to make up for the years that follow this.

I'd be ashamed before God if I made some silly interpretation of a perfectly precious truth. When God sends revival, in six months' time, he can make up for 60 years of war and devastation. Thus you know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God and the listener of earth, and my people will never be put to shame.

Now, friends, it seems to me that the subject of the solemn assembly is just about as clear a subject as any subject to be found anywhere, and most difficult. If you take a genius doctor's stand, God hates him. He can't help himself.

He has to turn his back upon the uneffected. But because of the God of loving kindness and great grace, he'll send for what he deserves. And don't thank God for that.

Did you ever get down on your face before God with utter seriousness and thank him that instead of sending the final judgment to America, he has graciously sent? You say, what judgment is he sending? It's the judgment of the withdrawal of his manifest presence. When God is in the midst of his people in a felt way, they don't dare sin. Does anybody dare to sin today? Why, the question has to be refreshed.

Is there anybody afraid to sin? Well, thank God, here and there, one or two. But for that army that calls itself the army of God, there's no fear of sin. We're sinning greedily with both hands openly.

Many of you understand that in a city where the police force goes on strike, there's an immense and an immediate increase of evil and corruption. Many of you have experiences such as I have had. I'm recollecting a specific experience where I was driving from my office home one night and glanced in my rearview mirror and realized there was a police car following me.

I was immediately badly uncomfortable. I looked at the speedometer. Well, within the speed limit, I thought about the last place where I had turned, had properly signaled, checked where I was in the lane.

All was well. Couldn't think of anything. I was good and well, but still, the police car.

And then to my consternation and grief, I realized his lights were blinking. And the only thing I could think of was that I was driving a very old vehicle and maybe some part had fallen off. So it was a very busy road with a curb and I had to look for a place to go off.

And as I was trying to get off the roadway, I glanced again in the mirror and to my amazement, the lights weren't blinking. And I still felt very uneasy. And I glanced again and they were blinking.

And then it dawned on me that it was the ray of the sun hitting the lenses of the police car light that made it look as if... But you will understand when I tell you I felt no peace or rest until we came to the next intersection. He turned left and I went straight. It was only then that I knew he was behind me accidentally and not on purpose.

The manifest presence of law and order has a remarkable effect. Nearby where we live, I had noticed for a number of years that parked at the gate of a major subdivision was a police car. Every time I passed there, day or night, there was that police car.

And I thought, isn't that amazing? How can they afford to have a police car do that all the time? And then to my astonishment, I read in the newspaper that the citizens of that subdivision had pooled money together, purchased a used car, painted it to look like a police car, parked it at the gate of the subdivision, and the crime rate in their subdivision was less than a third of the crime rate all around America. Even imitation police have profiled in that. I stood down in the airport in Albuquerque a while ago, waiting for my flight to be called back to gate, just coming away from a series of meetings, stood there just praying and musing over what the Lord had been doing.

It was, in fact, the case that I mentioned this morning where the men were collecting the workman's comp and so on illegally. And I stood there at the airport, and I was musing about what had been going on, and I glanced over my right shoulder, and there is a large-sized policeman staring at me. So I say to myself, I don't recognize him.

I wonder if he was in a meeting. Should I go over and speak to him? Well, I'll just stay quiet and see what happens. So I just stood there.

After a bit, I glanced again. He's still staring at me. I'm comfortable.

It's still unclear in my mind what to do. I waited a bit, and he's still there. So then I thought, well, I'll just sashay backward a little to see what happens.

When I went back perhaps 6 or 8 feet, I glanced again, and it was nothing but a piece of cardboard with a life-size image of a policeman on it that was having sex with a woman. I have said to you, you're under a God's judgment to withdraw of this manifest pattern. And so people sit without fear.

People in the church. People who once met over little wine now engaged in the grossest iniquity and opportunism slips down their cheek. God has judged us.

He's turned us over to the power of our own iniquities. It's as if he said to you, won't do things my way. I'll let you see what it's like to do things your way.

But there's another judgment that accompanies this withdrawal of this manifest pattern. We'll read about it in Jeremiah 13, the judgment of spiritual brokenness. When God's people sin and will not repent, he forces them to drink of the wine of his wrath to excess so that they stand without this brokenness.

Did you ever study drunkenness? If I ask you the list now, the twelve characteristics of a drunken person, did you know what they do? They get a big sum of money and they stand up to speak. You don't know a single thing they've said. They just give it.

And they think they've never spoken more intelligently in their whole life. That's what a lot of sermons I listen to are like. They're nothing but garbled words and absolute nonsense.

The drunk vomits all over himself. He stinks so you can't get anywhere near him. And yet he'll lush out and put his arm around you and wonder why you think loyally.

I understand. He has no idea of his filthiness. We have multitudes in the church today whose lives are so filthy that they literally stink.

And they don't even know that they can walk. I'm not going through the list of twelve, but you sit down and write the marks of drunkenness and you'll see that every single mark of drunkenness is a mark upon the

church today. We're a drunken people.

We're under God's judgment. I repeat again what I said already. Don't fool me.

They say if we're not careful God may judge us. He has already. But the appalling thing, the grievous thing, the thing that I can't understand, why, why, why, why are we so slow to inquire or what is your grievance with us and what must we do to be right? Instead, we blame somebody else.

Well, if it wasn't for those rotten politicians, things wouldn't be this way. If we could just get these abortionists out of the way, then we'd be all right. That's what God needs.

No! God has no quarrel with the abortionists. What's surprising on a sinner's skin? God's quarrel is with his own people. There was a time when the abortionists could not have survived because the pure church of Jesus Christ was salt in the earth and bright in the land.

He walked that salty earth and he ceased to be bright. And all manner of evil can spring up around us and we foolishly blame the evil ones instead of coming right down to the root of the issue, which is the church. It is the unrepentant church that God has brought unto judgment and the judgment of God upon the church has enabled evil to thrive in the world.

Don't waste your time picketing abortion clinics. There's any place to picket. Picket your own heart.

Don't blame it on the educational system, some on the media. I'm not holding them up as prime examples of dignity and purity. I'm just saying God's quarrel is with us and not with them.

And when the church is right with God, the world will be afraid of its own people. I look back over the years when I've been in Spain and I see the horrendous changes that have occurred. And I often think of this question, is it that there is so much more evil in the world than there was when I was a young man? I don't know.

But there is one thing I know absolutely, and I've referred to this already, there was a time and now the most violent and awful things occur. On the street corners and on the television screens are very delicate and there is no quality about watching. That leads me to the final segment of our gathering today.

And I want to come back now at the end to the subject of dependence once more. And I want to ask you to turn with me to the Book of Matthew and this portion that I'm about to read will be quite familiar to many of you. Chapter 3 of Matthew, verse 1. Matthew 3, verse 1. Now in those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea saying, repent.

For the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet saying, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair and the leather belt about his waist and his food was locusts and wild honey.

Then Jerusalem was going up in it and all Judea and all the districts around the Jordan. And they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River and they confessed their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, you cruel vipers, who warrant you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with your repentance.

And do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, we have Abraham for our father. For I say to you that God is able from these stones to raise up children, ain't he now? And the axe is already laid at the root of the tree. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

As for me, I baptize you in water for repentance. But he who is coming after me is mightier than I and I'm not even fit to remove his sandals. He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and his wing-wing form is in his hand.

And he will thoroughly clean his threshing floor and he will gather his wheat into the vine that he will burn up to shadow the unquenchable fire. Now, the words of John the Baptist and the Pharisees and the Sadducees would not seem to me to be suitable words to address to you. I might be wrong in refusing to do so, but there's nothing in my heart that says that I ought to address this body as a generation of vipers.

There are plenty of vipers in the churches, but I don't think many sleep in here. I would expect probably none came to bed. But there is something very urgent that this passage enables us to focus on.

As you read here in Matthew, you get the impression that when this gang of Pharisees and Sadducees came forth after him, John baptized them. Is that your impression? In some shape or hand, no, that flattens my heart. We read in a very plain statement to him, he didn't baptize them.

Luke 7, verse 30. Well, that leads me to confirm something that I said this morning. John discerned those who were ready for his baptism, and he discerned those who were not ready.

Now, we're not pretending that the baptism of John is the same as the baptism of Christ. We know that the baptism of John was a baptism of preparation, of readiness. We read these words quoted from Isaiah, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord, make his path straight.

We know that John's task assigned by the Holy One was the scribes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees were not ready when Christ came. And when Christ came to his own, so John not only called them to judgment, but he refused at that time. I hope you're listening.

I know it's been a long day for you, but actually I've been here the same length of time you have. I am grieved deeply at the realization that many of us do not know the times in which we live. Has it occurred to you? This sounds so silly, but it's so urgent.

Has it occurred to you that we are not living 50 years ago? Fifty years ago, a preacher could get in the pulpit and drop a tidbit or two of truth, and the vast majority were sufficiently vividly literate to be able to handle his little droppings of truth. But you wouldn't send a missionary to some war-thieving nation and expect that they could drop sweet little tidbits and God bless you with a wonderful plan for your life and things like that, and see any real hope. We are living now in one of the world's foremost pagan nations.

We are living in a time when the vast majority of people in our churches don't even know that there are two major parts to the Bible. We are living at a time of gross stupidity, of physical ignorance, and yet we are proclaiming a message that consists of juicy tidbits that the rank unbeliever can't relate to. And whenever you induce someone to a decision for Christ based upon a fraction of the truth, you get less than a true convert.

John the Baptist, I repeat, discerned that there were people coming to him for baptism who were not fit to be baptized, but many pastors who came in the room today will baptize anyone asked for it. I ask not only

where is your heart, but where is your head? Do you realize that you are a major contributor to the problem that has overstepped us and is destroying us as a nation? All these millions and millions of people who call themselves Christians and they are no more saved than Satan himself. Nobody is saved as a result of ascending to truth.

We read in our Bibles what does the devil believe. He believes in the virgin birth of Christ. Many in our churches don't.

He believes that Christ was indeed the incarnate Son of God. Many don't, who call themselves convicts. He believes that Jesus taught and preached and worked many mighty miracles.

Many don't believe that. He believes that Christ was persecuted from the earliest days of his ministry and put to death by religious leaders. Many of our religious leaders couldn't imagine themselves as guilty of anything of satanism.

He believes that Christ was not only crucified, dead, and buried, but that he rose again from the dead. And I say, he believes it. He also believes that when Jesus Christ died, he died as the substitutionary Lamb who took upon his own shoulders the sin of the Virgin Mary.

The devil believes that everyone who reveals that Jesus Christ, in repentance and faith, will be saved. Because that makes the devil a Christian. Why not? He believes.

Well, for one reason, he comes. I've never seen that many people come. It would appear to me that the devil has more grace than most church members.

But he's still not a Christian. You know why? When the Bible calls upon us to believe, it calls upon us to repent and believe. And the word belief is not passive.

It is active. True belief is not acquiescence to truth. It's not, as I said already, mental ascent.

No, if I believe and Jesus says to me, sit down and sit up, he really does do as he's told. And to say that you believe and yet to actively resist and to refuse to bend and bow declares the fact that you're not broken and not contrite and therefore makes his pleasant claim. True belief requires active obedience.

Now, nobody when they begin believing knows everything they're supposed to do. So I'm not talking about perfection. I'm just saying as the claims of God draw upon your soul, you actively submit.

I spoke about the solemn assembly. I spoke about a pastor ordering everybody to be present. And in the ordinary congregation, there would be a multitude that would say, Pastor, you haven't done anything right.

And they believed that. If they knew God, they would know God is too great for them. And they would know that God's way is to speak through children's spokesmen.

And it was resistance. This is part of our American heritage. We love our own freedom.

I'm as important as the next guy. We pretend that in the great Protestant Reformation, the priesthood of all believers comes down to the fact, I say shut up. I'll take care of my own life.

You don't have to bother. Everyone who believes knows that God appoints his men to lead his flock. And then the pastor says, come to the solemn assembly.

Others, sick or can't, of course, there are businessmen who are out of the country. They're not making it impossible. I'm just saying that belief means active obedience.

And I am stressing the wisdom of John the Baptist in refusing to baptize those who were not preparing the way of the Lord. Now, Christian baptism, as I said, is not preparing the way of the Lord. I don't happen to be a Baptist.

Many times I wish I were. But I want congregations to do forgiveness for that. In the fellowship in which I minister, we even have some who baptize infants.

I don't like that. I can do it myself. That's what it means to be a congregation, to give freedom of conscience, brother.

Some baptize by strengthening, some by poisoning, and some by nourishing. Well, I like to nourish people. I don't make a fuss about it.

It's just that it so beautifully represents the baptism of Christ. I go down under water, symbolizing the fact that I'm dead. I come up out of water, symbolizing the fact that I'm raised to newness of life in Christ Jesus.

And that some of you are busy baptizing people who never died, who are in sorrow, who never yielded to Christ's authority, who have not one intention in the world of bowing continuously to him. And so we need to deal in the closing moments now with this subject of repentance again, and from the standpoint I stressed toward the end of this morning, the standpoint of doctrinal error. It's a very profound doctrinal issue when you baptize those who are not ready to be baptized.

It indicates a great deal about your own system and your understanding of the message. Now, in this passage, John, not only said to the generation of vipers, but he said to them, And bring forth fruit in keeping with your repentance. And it's upon those few words that I've said, I want to look at my watch and see where we are time-wise.

Oh, my word, I believe we've already run before. So I won't say what I have hoped, nor will I quote. I want to stress three things.

The nature of true repentance is that it is not a one-time act, but it's an ongoing commitment or attitude. It's not enough to say, I'm repentant. I must say and know, I am repentant, day in, day out, year after year.

I live as a repentant person. I would not baptize anybody on their profession day in a pagan society. If you sent me as a missionary 50 years ago to some dark spot on the continent, you would have instructed me in sending me, don't baptize anyone until they've been through it, until they've proved that they have understood it and have made a response to Christ that is a living and enduring response.

We all want the wisdom of missionaries who don't hastily baptize. But, dear friends, as I said already, this is the pagan nation. And some of you are baptizing people on professional faith, and that's all they've got, is a new vocabulary.

They've never had a change of heart. They're not new creatures in Christ Jesus. I would not permanently baptize anybody in a pagan society.

I would give them time to prove that they had truly repented and that they understood that repentance is not a single act, but a lifetime commitment. Secondly, and I spoke of this somewhat this morning, and so I'll be very brief, we need to learn to distinguish between those who have repented of the fruits, F-R-U-I-T-S, the fruits of sin, and those who have repented of the roots. I gave an illustration this morning, speaking of persons who commit sexual acts of impurity who rarely have done anything in confessing a given sexual impurity, because underneath all impure sexuality is pride.

I would urge those of you who baptize others, those of you who pray for the lost, those of you who witness and seek to win others, I would urge you to go to the root, always the root, and never feel any comfort, never feel as if you've done your job, surely never give any word of encouragement or assurance to anybody until there is overwhelming evidence that they have repented of the roots of sin. It's not enough to say, I'm sorry for what I've done. I must reach that point where I am broken and greedy over what I am.

What I am is vastly more consequential than what I do. And we've caught all kinds of people, Christians, who have never repented of what they are, only of something they did. And to learn that distinction, and then further the point, here I will give you a bit longer, and if you want to hear that, you need to learn to distinguish between what our forefathers described as legal, l-e-g-a-l, legal repentance, and evangelical repentance.

Do you know those distinctions? How many of you know what I'm talking about? Well, then you see, you need to stay for a few minutes and get this in strength. I had spoken on this subject in one of the Eastern churches some time back, and at the end of the service, a lovely old gentleman hovered up to me, a very sweet, straight man, quite elderly, and he looked at me ever so graciously, and he said, Now, Mr. Roberts, concerning this matter of ego repentance, I said, Excuse me, sir, I didn't use the word ego today. He said, That's what you were talking about, ego repentance versus evangelical repentance.

No, sir, I said I was talking about legal, l-e-g-a-l. Oh, he said, My apologies, sir. You see, I'm old.

My hearing isn't so good. No, I said, Sir, I will not apologize. I will not accept your apology.

Instead, I must ask you to accept my apology. He said, What do you mean? I said, Your word is better than mine. That's what our fathers meant when they said legal.

They meant that which you do for yourself. Or against evangelical, that which you do for God. May I put it to you in the form of a personal question? The repentance that you love, is it legal? Is it evangelical? I put it to you pastors and friends of the people.

Have you led them in ego repentance? Or evangelical repentance? He said, Spread it out so they understand you. Let me pretend that this is an evangelistic service, and that we're just about to close. We are.

Even though it isn't. That doesn't sound like an evangelist to me. Many an evangelist comes to the end of the sermon, and this is what it really comes down to.

A series of ego centric issues. You're here tonight. You've been carrying this terrible weight around you.

You're a young woman. You had an abortion. At the time you thought nothing of it.

Others encouraged you in it. You were pleased with yourself for doing it, but for months now, you haven't been able to escape the weight of it. You say, The terrible thing, I murdered my own child.

Come to Christ tonight, and you roll the terrible weight off your shoulders. Is that true? Well, there is truth in it. But coming to Christ to escape a weight is a very shoddy reason to come to Christ.

Or if you feel you may turn in this direction, you're here, you're lonely. Your life seems just full of misery and sorrow. You say to yourself, Well, there's nobody that cares.

There's nobody that understands. My husband of years standing just left me. Nobody cares.

I don't know how I can go on. It's so lonely. Come to Christ.

He'll be your friend. What a friend we have in Jesus. He causes all our sins and griefs to get to bear.

There is a friend that's taken closer than a brother. Come to Christ and get a friend. Well, it's wonderful, isn't it? But it's a lousy reason to urge somebody to repent or change the picture a little.

Here's the preacher lining up, getting ready for the altar call. And he says, Tonight, you have become aware of the fact that you are a sinner on your way to hell. And you have the opportunity tonight to accept Christ and to escape hell.

And this opportunity may never be given to you again. Wouldn't it be terrible if you spent all eternity in remorse? Because tonight, when I appeal to you to accept Christ, you will do it. Come to Christ tonight and escape hell.

And does one escape hell in coming to Christ? Well, yes. Yes, if they truly come. But is that the grounds on which we ought to appeal to people? Listen, friends.

Here is the most significant whole thing. The essence of all sin is self. You know that? The essence of all sin is self.

Me versus you. It's us versus not. It's always the elevations.

Can one heed their self-righteousness and be repentant into himself? Can I come to Christ for what I can get? Can I come to Christ for what I can escape? And have genuine repentance? Listen carefully. You may have induced many to respond to Christ how the pure, selfish, greedy motive. But if you leave them there, they're in the grip still to be repented of.

For all true repentance is death to self. Not I, but Christ. If anybody would be my disciple, let him deny himself.

Let him take up his cloths. Let him follow me. Now, here's where we come right down to the issue I want to close with.

We are busy laboring in churches, many of us, and we're close to the point of default. Many of you have struggled and done the best you can how to get your congregation stirred up and moving in God's direction, and all you get are printbacks thrown at you. And you've thought yourself words like this.

Of the 500 people we've got in our congregation, 120 are absolute deadheads, and 80 bear the whole burden. Use your own numbers. I liken the contemporary American evangelical church to a large

swimming pool.

We'll say there are 200 members in the church I'm now describing. They're all in the pool. 160 of them are on the bottom, and 40 of them are bobbing around like corpse on the top.

And the pastor looks down, Oh, what a job I've got on my hands. So he plunges to the bottom, and he lays hold of five of these chunks of iron, and he raises them to the surface, and he holds them there, but he can't hold them long because he's still got 155. So down he goes again for another row, and by the time he gets the second handful up, the first handful is back down.

He's tired, and thinking about quitting, he knows what the term burnout means, and along comes a church growth expert. He says, Oh, pastor, oh, pastor, don't be foolish. You've got 39 other people bobbing around on top, so each one goes down and gets a handful.

And now all congregations board up. But they're still there. They're still like chunks of iron.

And sooner or later, somebody's going to want a moment's rest, and they're going to drop their load, and it's going down to the bottom. And we've got to face the fact of what happened. 160 chunks of iron, no repentance other than evil repentance.

What they did, they did for themselves. Now, I ask you this question. How much motivating power is there in ego repentance? Why, the person who repents for evil's sake repents no further and no longer than he needs to to get what he thinks he wants.

But now, if you look at the contrast, heaven and hell for repentance. Again, let's pretend we're in the final moments of evangelistic reading, and I'm about to give the call. And I say, you're here tonight, and you're violent, and you're wicked, filthy, rotten, corrupt, no good sinner.

There is a holy God who made you, and he made you for himself. He made you for his purposes. He made you to love and to honor him.

And in your violence and foolishness, you've served yourself and neglected this God. You're under his wrath. Soon, you'll pay the penalty of your sin.

God will send you to hell, but he doesn't want to. God was so deeply worried and concerned about you that his own son came and died on the cross in your place. And for all your filth and corruption, on his own children, you've been violent, wicked persons.

You've treated Christ with contempt. And even tonight, you're only interested in what you can get out of him. But I beg you, I beseech you, come to Christ, not because of what Christ will do, but because of who Christ is.

Come because of his excellency. Come because it is your duty, because he made you for himself, and you need to become the man, the woman he made you to be. Oh, I can spell that greatly, but you get the picture.

Every person who comes to Christ because of who Christ is comes how far? How much motivation is there in the person who's come to Christ because of who he is? Why, there's ceaseless motivation. Those who turn to Christ for his answer cannot turn often enough, cannot come close enough, cannot follow any harder, don't know how even to get closer. He is there.

What about preaching the gospel? What about refusing to baptize anybody until the evidence is in place that their repentance is not an act? It's not an act. And that their repentance is reached to every root of sin, and the self is dead, and Christ is alive. Now I have said to you, it would be a grievous mistake, perhaps to understand why we do not deal with the cause of the church.

But I've tried to say to you, and you may reject it, is that the church is not only because of specific sins that we're guilty of personally and corporately, but because we have abused in Christian the gospel, and we've made converts that are three or four more children of the devil, and they were before we began on that. Now our time is gone, and then some. But still, it would appear to me that you listen to those clearly, tarrying and being sure that their own repentance is right, and then setting their paths to proclaim it, so that God may lift the church and come.

Anything in the future, and the audio tapes from today will be available at the table on the back. But I think the only other thing to do is just to gather in this altar area and let the Lord saturate into our lives what we've heard from the Holy Spirit today. God bless you, and may He bring repentance.

It seems like you can sit in a crowd like this today and think, oh, we've got such a job to do. How many hundreds and hundreds of pastors there are in the region. But I'm glad that no brother, by many or by few, can still deliver.

God bless you as we gather together in this altar area, and just seek Him before we leave. The Lord bless you. Be with you.

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Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/-sBE6j2A9mk.mp4>

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