

## HOW DO WE REPENT?

**THE PURPOSE OF THIS TEACHING** - As a logical response to the previous three weeks teachings we take an in-depth look at repentance. We hope to help the participant repent of the sins that have been uncovered thus far.

1. Finally, this week, no more sins. We are coming out of the tunnel, and this session we will deal with repentance and forgiveness. First, though, let me comment briefly on what we have been dealing with:
  - a. First of all, we have been dealing with sins up front because most change in our lives starts with repentance. The first word in the ministry of John the Baptist was, "Repent". The first word in the ministry of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew is, "Repent".
  - b. We have been dealing, not with sins of behavior, but with sins of the heart. It is out of the heart that we are and what we become flows. "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man..." (Matt. 15:19-20). The sins of the flesh are relatively easy; we can confess them all day, but the sins of the heart are so much more difficult to get to, and they are what defile. They are what hold us in homosexuality. Jesus talked much more about the sins of the heart than He did the sins of the flesh.
  - c. As we look at our sins, we need to keep a balanced perspective. We live in a sinful and broken world, and we are all its victims. Many of our worst sins were our desperate responses to the cruel and hurtful things that happened to us. But we also have a great capacity to sin - that is to respond in wrong and ultimately destructive ways to the difficult things in life. But note also, we have always had a certain freedom to respond differently. Others in our very same circumstances did not respond in the same way.
  - d. These ways of responding became habitual; that is, they became a part of us - often unconscious, involuntary. That is why we usually can't do anything about them ourselves. We've tried. Perhaps, with long term therapy, some of these patterns could change slightly.
  - e. But, by and large, we are powerless. We need a power greater than ourselves. As we know, we have that power in Jesus Christ. He is the One with power over sin and death. He, who knew no sin, took the sin of the whole world on Himself. He bore our sins. He paid the price that we couldn't pay. He won the victory which means the power of sin over us has been broken. And that has enormous implications for us in our struggle with addictions.

2. The question for us is: How do we get in touch with that power that overcame sin and death? How do we appropriate that into our lives and make it ours? This question is particularly relevant if you have confessed a sin over and over and still find yourself living in the power of that sin.
3. As we seek answers to those questions, let's take repentance apart and look at what it really involves.

A. First, . . . . . conviction

(1). We must be convicted, but that can mean two things:

- (a). We watch a TV show we know we shouldn't watch, get worked up and act out on our addiction. Convicted, here is almost too strong a word. Here it just means "acknowledged"; we didn't need any great work of the Holy Spirit to tell us what we had done wrong. And this applies to most of our day-to-day sins.
- (b). Then, there is the conviction that is much more like standing in a court and hearing the booming voice of the judge pronounce, "Guilty!" This conviction is like a dagger through the heart.

(2). Let's take a look at this deeper conviction.

- (a). This is the conviction that occurs when we first recognize the type of sin that we have been talking about for the past three weeks.
- (b). Through the Holy Spirit, we come to see that a whole area of our life - an entire way we have dealt with life - has been deeply sinful; something we never recognized before.

**TEACHER'S TESTIMONY** or:

Alan's experience (shared two weeks ago) with justified self-centeredness was like this, it was like God was sending a thousand needles through his heart as he saw example after example of his terrible self-centeredness. It was like looking down a, long, dark shaft into the incredible darkness of his own soul. . . . looking almost into hell itself.

- (c). It is excruciating; the pain can be almost unbearable. But then it is wonderful. The pain lasts only a very short time, and all of a sudden there is a wonderful feeling that something is being lifted off of you. Some terrible burden you have

carried around for years is being lifted. It's a gross and totally inadequate analogy, but it's like a terribly painful boil has just been lanced, and all of the pain disappears. Freedom, joy, a true sense of forgiveness and the mercy of the Lord flow over you.

- (3). We can't force this or make it happen. We can only seek it by being willing to look into the darkness of our hearts. That's what has been happening if you are willing to keep going down this road. This is going to happen to you.

B. Now, let's look at repentance itself

- (1). It might help us to understand it if we look at what it is not.
  - (a). It is not assurance that you will never do the same thing again. If it is something like unrighteous anger, you can be almost certain you will do it again. If it's something that has been with you so long, you may really doubt that you can stop, but the vital thing is that you are willing to have it stop. It is easier to repent of something like this if you remember that, ultimately, it is God's power, not your own, that will get you over this thing. On your part, it is the willingness and the choice.
  - (b). Repentance does not mean you really hate the sin. (That's a relief, isn't it.) You may really love that person God is calling you to walk away from, but you are willing.
  - (c). Repentance is not merely disappointment in yourself—mere regret. This is a sneaky one and probably makes up much of what we think is repentance. “I let myself down. Really, a person like me shouldn't be doing something like that.” (Hear the pride?) I didn't live up to my sterling character; I'm humiliated. Some regrets are in order, but watch out for wounded pride masquerading as repentance.
  - (d). Repentance is not a mechanical act. “Every night I use and every morning I repent, and God assured me that He will forgive me.” Although you may not be experiencing great sorrow over your sin, neither should you be rationalizing it by either excusing it. . (“Well, we all sin”). There must be some acknowledgment of personal responsibility and some sense of having offended God.
- (2). That leads us to what repentance really is - It's an acknowledgment that we have **offended God**, and we desire to change and will try to change. It means turning.

- (a). Psalm 51 can be extremely helpful in getting us to put things in the right perspective when we seek to repent:

“Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in Thy sight, so that Thou are justified in Thy sentence and blameless in Thy judgment.” (Verse 4)

- (b). How have we offended God? He loves us and in His love for us has told us the best way to live, and we have chosen to ignore Him. We have turned our backs on Him and His love and mercy, much as a child can turn from his or her parents.
- (c). Something that helps you to sense the true gravity of your sin is to picture Jesus on the cross: He is hanging there with weight of every sin in the world hanging on Him - tearing at His nail-pierced hands, pulling his joints almost apart. And you walk up to Him and throw your sin on Him and say, glibly, “Here's one more; take this.” And look at the increase of His agony.

### C. Confession

- (1). To confess means to agree; we are agreeing with God, and maybe with another person that what we did was wrong.
- (2). I would urge you to always confess with your lips. Say the words out loud. There is such power in the spoken word. There can be such fuzziness in our minds. I find that my confession, spoken out loud to God, seems much more real.
- (3). And, of course, better yet, confess your sins to another believer. You don't always have to do this to obtain forgiveness, but Scripture is clear that this is the better way.
- (a). James 5:16 says, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed”.
- (b). This confession may be sacramental, or to any other Christian brother or sister. Your New Directions group or your group leader can be playing this role for you right now.
- (c). The person who hears your confession has been given the authority to pronounce that God has forgiven you. (John 20:23)
- (d). Christianity is not the “me and God” religion that many of us evangelical

Protestants want to make it. We can be fully Christian only if we live out our lives as a part of His Body here on earth.

- D. Now, I want to talk about a contrite heart.
- (1). Contrite means sorrowful, brokenhearted. It means we agonize, we ache, we want to weep over our sins.
  - (2). I don't often feel that way, do you? Most of us seldom or never do although I have known some believers who have.
  - (3). The reason most of us don't respond to our sins this way, I believe, is that contrition is a fruit of the Spirit. It is something that grows in us as we grow in Jesus Christ. . . . like love, joy, peace, etc. I also believe it is one of the last fruits to grow in us. It comes as we grow in our capacity to truly love God and His people--to love them so much that the pain of hurting them is almost unbearable. I'm not there yet, but I hope to be one day.
  - (4). The point here is that I don't want you to berate yourself if you don't feel great emotional pain over every sin. Hopefully, we all are growing towards that.
1. What happens when we repent? We are forgiven! "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That is His promise to us.
- a. For us, it is especially good to look at the favorite Scripture passage of addiction ministries: I Cor. 6:9-11:  

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.
- (1). Washed: made clean from the blot of the stain
  - (2). Sanctified: made holy; set apart
  - (3). Justified: made guiltless, free from blame
  - (4). That's what happens when we repent and confess - what great news!

- b. What effect does this have on our lives in a very practical sense?
- (1). If it is a major breakthrough - acknowledgment of a major sin that had not been recognized before - we may find ourselves radically changed. Say it is a sudden realization that you have been consumed by anger for much of your life. With a deep hearted conviction of that sin, every time you start to feel angry you will be reminded of that; you may start praising and thanking God for how He has made you, and you will change.
  - (2). If it is the daily, persistent kind of sin, God gives you a new beginning - yes, even seventy times seventy times He'll give you a new start. You don't have to let the burden of past sins accumulate; you don't have to feel cut off from God.
  - (3). The forgiveness is immediate although your regrets about your sin may fade more slowly.
  - (4). The consequences of your sin may not be gone, however. But if we do confess and are restored to our relationship with God, He is free to bring good even out of the bad consequences. And the bad consequences are only for this life; the good things are for eternity.
5. Why are we sometimes reluctant to confess, or at least to reap the blessings of God's mercy?
- a. First of all, God's mercy may seem just too good to be true. By our human standards, it probably is. So, we believe we need to suffer for a little while. We may think we need time to comprehend the real depth of our sin, but most likely, some element of pride in us wants to pay part of the price for it ourselves - as if what Jesus did wasn't enough.
  - b. We may feel - I've sinned and confessed too many times. I feel like a hypocrite coming back to God over and over again with the same thing, almost sure that this won't be the last time because I really haven't repented.
  - c. But these thoughts are not valid. God's mercy is beyond our understanding. We never deserve it. We can't fully understand His mercy, but it is His promise. He wants to set us free.

### A PRAYER

Lord God, You have promised that if we confess our sins, you are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Lord, we acknowledge that there are sins in our heart that give life to our addictive struggle, and we want to be done with them. We give you permission, Lord, to

start showing us what those areas are that we might lay them before your cross and know the freedom of forgiveness through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. AMEN.

**Scripture Memory Verse:**

**Psalm 51:4 (NASB)** Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight, so that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, and blameless when Thou dost judge.

**Assignment for the Week:**

1. In the past three weeks we have dealt with:

- Self-protection
- Self-pity
- Self-centeredness
- Pride
- Envy
- A Critical spirit
- Bitterness
- Unforgiveness
- Idolatry

Read over your notes from Weeks 4, 5, and 6, and prayerfully select the one sin of the heart that is likely your greatest stumbling block in overcoming addiction.

Determine to deal with that sin in the coming weeks. If possible, develop some strategies for dealing with it. And at the right time, confess it.

Write about this in your Journal, and share what is happening with your group.

2. Read the article in your Supplemental materials: "Be Ye Perfect: What Does That Mean?"