

Lesson 5 – Who Must Repent?

Being a member of the church of Jesus Christ is not the same as being a member of a club. Being a member of the church involves the whole of one's life. As we studied in Lesson 4, we are all sinners. We want to live our own way. As we have also seen, Christ died for our sins. He shed his blood so that forgiveness of our transgressions would be possible. This does not mean that everything is already done, that I already have forgiveness. No way. We have to change as we contemplate the sacrifice of Christ. We have to admit that we are sinners and need His salvation. Since it is sin that has separated us from God, we have to renounce sin. We have to repent.

What Exactly Is Repentance?

(Ask the student if they understand what repentance is.) In simple words, repentance is a change of mind. It is a decision not to continue living in the same way that one has lived. It is recognizing that one needs to change.

In Acts chapter 2, when the gospel was preached for the first time after the death and resurrection of Christ, upon hearing the message the people felt guilty for having killed the Son of God. They asked Peter what they should do. (Read Acts 2:36-38) (Ask the student what the first thing is that Peter told them to do.) "Repent." They had sought the death of Jesus as if He were a criminal. They had to change their minds about the person of Jesus, about who He is. They had to change their minds about their evil attitude in asking for the death of the Savior of the world. They had to decide to follow God and not go their own way.

Godly Sorrow

But to better appreciate the full meaning of what repentance is, we need to dig deeper. First, we have to understand what precedes repentance, what produces repentance: sorrow. The Bible speaks of two kinds of sorrow. (Ask the student what two kinds of sorrow are mentioned in 2 Corinthians 7:10.) "Godly sorrow" and "sorrow of the world." The perfect example to illustrate this difference is found in the lives of two apostles: Peter and Judas Iscariot. (Read Matthew 26:69-75) When Peter acknowledged his great sin in denying that he had known Jesus, he "wept bitterly." After Christ's resurrection, Peter became a very courageous man to testify for Christ regardless of the consequences. (Read Matthew 27:3-5) Judas, on the other hand, after selling Christ for 30 pieces of silver, "hanged himself." It is true that this text says that Judas "felt remorse," but we see that it was not true repentance. Instead of weeping, facing his great sin, and changing his life, he decided to commit suicide. We see perfectly here that "the sorrow of the world produces death." On the other hand, Peter's sorrow produced true repentance.

Consider another example of the two kinds of sorrow: John smokes two packs of cigarettes every day. He goes to the doctor who tells him that he must stop smoking to avoid cancer. John leaves the office sad because he loves to smoke, but he quits so he doesn't get cancer. Bill, on the other hand, one day realizes that by smoking he is mistreating the body that God gave him, and he is saddened for having abused God's gift for temporary pleasure. Both John and Bill quit smoking, but John did it only for his own benefit, while Bill did it to be right with God. The sorrow that produces repentance is a sorrow for having sinned against God with the desire to live as God wants.

Fruit of Repentance

As we have seen, repentance itself is a change of mind, which is the result of sorrow for the sins one has committed. Now, for the change of mind to be true, it has to result in a change of life. (Read Matthew 3:8) (Ask the student in what words did John describe this change?) "Fruit worthy of repentance." A true change of mind will produce a change of life. One was walking in one direction; now they make a 180 degree turn to walk in the other direction. One cannot seek God's forgiveness and then continue with the same life. Christ spoke of being "born anew." (Read John 3:3-7) (Ask the student what comes to mind with the expression "born anew" or "born again.") In another lesson we will look at all that is involved in being born again. But for now, the point is that to follow Christ requires such a drastic change in life that it's like starting another life. You are no longer the same person. Following Christ is not simply attending church every Sunday. No. One must be born a second time.

Let's understand that we are not talking about leaving a few sins, leaving only the sins that we want to leave. God requires total repentance. It is a matter of giving your life completely to Christ Jesus. Let's also not think that only the worst people need repentance. (Read Luke 13:1-5) Jesus clarified: "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all perish in the same way." Repentance is not just for "bad" sinners. It is for all of us, "for all have sinned" (Romans 3:23).

Questions

1. What is repentance in itself? (it's a change of mind)
2. What are three important elements in repentance? (Godly sorrow, change of mind, fruit of repentance)
3. What is the difference between godly sorrow and the sorrow of the world? (The first is a sorrow for having sinned against God together with a desire to change, to repent. The second is a sorrow for oneself without a desire to give one's life to God.)
4. What is the meaning of the expression "born again"? (it is such a drastic change in life that it is as if one began another life)
5. How many sins do we need to repent of? (all)