

**REPENTANCE - KNOWING WHY AND KNOWING HOW - Both Are Important - Part five - Sunday, September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2012, 6:30 p.m.**

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**ONGOING REPENTANCE AND THE FUTURE FREEDOM FROM THE BONDAGE AND POWER OF SIN**

**Matthew 3:1-12 - "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, [2] "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." [3] For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.' "[4] Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. [5] Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, [6] and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. [7] But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, [willing to be baptized - *religion without repentance*] he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? [8] Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. [9] And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' [NOT willing to admit and repent of sin] for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. [10] Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. [11] "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. [12] His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."**

I think you can instantly see that this is a parallel passage to the account we've been studying in Luke. The main difference, which I mentioned briefly in the last message in this series, is that Matthew zeros in more specifically on the approach of the Pharisees

and the Sadducees as they came to John to be baptized. Matthew's point is to highlight the kind of people who have the **hardest time** walking in ongoing repentance and **why** they have this unrepentant tendency.

I'm going to continue with this teaching next Sunday night. I have **four points I'd like to draw out of this passage**. We'll study two tonight and two next week.

Here's where I want to start out. I want to take a quick overview of what the Scriptures teach about repentance **as it relates to sin**. Remember, **repentance always has to do with sin**. It has to do with **facing sin, calling it sin, agreeing with God's assessment of sin, confessing sin**, and finally, **being delivered from both sin's guilt and its bondage**. Matthew means all of these things when he records these words - **Matthew 3:6** - **"....and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."**

All of this relates to the whole doctrine of the Incarnation. It's important to remember that Jesus never came just to **prove** that we were sinners. He never came just to **condemn us for our sin** - to make us feel bad and guilty. And something else: He never came just to provide **forgiveness** for our sin. The gospel accounts of Jesus' birth ring with much better news than that: **Matthew 1:21** - **"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."**

These words, spoken **before** Jesus was even born, tell of the **ongoing effect** His death and resurrection will have on those who come to Him for deliverance. It wasn't just a matter of being **pronounced** righteous when they were saved. Through the work of Jesus Christ (which wasn't completed at His **birth**, but at His **death and resurrection**) Christians could experience this ongoing **deliverance from their sins**.

This deliverance **from** sin is the world's testimony to the reality of the Christian faith. The

world can't see your **forgiveness**. That's all hidden and internal. But the world **can** see your deliverance **from** sin. We need to remember this. We will never reach the world with half a gospel. We need to demonstrate **deliverance** from the sins that bind their hearts in misery and deception.

But that ongoing deliverance **from** sin would be forever linked to their ongoing repentance **of** sin. With all this in mind, let's look at what the Scriptures say about sin specifically:

1) **TO SIN IS TO MISS THE MARK OR TARGET OF GOD'S WILL**

**Romans 3:23** - "**....for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....**"

The word for sin in this verse literally means "**to miss the mark.**" Like an archer who can't hit the bulls eye, this verse speaks to our fundamental **inability** to accomplish what God expects from us.

That's what "**falling short**" means - "**....for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....**" We can't reach it. We can't get there. We can't measure up. Paul hits the nail on the head in this short verse when he points out our essential **inability** to please God.

In fact, this is the central feature of the person outside of Christ Jesus. He is **not capable** of pleasing God. The one outside of Christ is speaking a measure of truth when, in his own strength, he says, "**I just can't help my addictions to abusive habits and thought patterns!**" "**I just can't live with that person another day!**" "**I just can't face my situation one more moment!**" "**I just can't say no to sexual temptation!**"

This is the common human problem outside of Christ Jesus - ***“I just can’t measure up! I can’t do it! It’s just not in me. I can never measure up to what I know I’m created to be. I can only sustain brief moments of satisfaction and accomplishment.”***

Of course, we are all different. We will have different areas of stronger will-power and weaker. We won’t all fall in exactly the same area. But we will all fall somewhere at some time in our own strength.

But now there’s an important distinction to make. I’m speaking in this gathering, not to those ***outside*** of Christ, but, for the most part, to those ***indwelt*** by Christ by the Holy Spirit. And all of those earlier statements don’t have the same kind of application to you. And that’s not just wishful thinking:

**Ephesians 2:1-6** - “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you **once walked**, following the **course of this world**, following the **prince of the power of the air**, the **spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience**— [3] among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were **by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind** [ The haunting words are, “...like the rest of mankind.” I may not have committed the very same sins, but I am just as much a child of God’s just wrath as anyone else on this planet. Nice people have a hard time admitting that]. **[4] But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— [6] and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,”**

It is simply inaccurate and spiritually defeating for the Christian to say, ***“I just can’t put up with this situation,”*** or, ***“I just can’t live with that person,”*** or, ***“I just can’t forgive that person.”*** Paul says, “Now that you have been raised with Christ Jesus, ***stop living like a dead person! Don’t allow yourself to continue in that stance of unbelief and unrepentance!***”

You ***can*** now do those things, not in your own strength, but through Christ who lives in you. The inward life of Christ is real life. It comes with its own ***energy***. Perhaps this realization will come gradually, even slowly at first. Often these victories don’t come without an element of struggle. But it ***can*** happen as you yield ***repentantly*** and ***honestly*** and ***consistently*** to the ongoing promptings of the Holy Spirit in you. I’m going to talk at length about those promptings of the Spirit at length next Sunday night.

## 2) **TO SIN IS TO ACT IN REBELLION AGAINST THE WILL OF GOD**

**1 John 3:4** - ***“Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.”***

This verse presents another aspect of sinful actions and attitudes. John says sin is ***“lawlessness.”*** Sin is ***rebellion***. This is so important. Our first point presented sin as ***inability***, but it’s also much more than that. It’s ***rebellion***. No one will deal effectively and seriously with sin until he comes to sense the ***guilt*** in sin.

We are so conditioned, outside the church, and increasingly, ***inside*** the church as well, to think of sin exclusively in terms of ***lack***, or ***some kind of inner sickness***, or ***improper self image***. And the Word of the Spirit of God is that all of those elements may be present in our lives to varying degrees, but at its root - at its very essence - ***sin is rebellion against God’s law***. John says it is ***“lawlessness.”***

**“Wet Paint - Do not touch!”** There’s something in all of us that is just drawn to that sign. That fundamental rebellion crops up in all our lives. And because it’s so common, we all find ways increasingly to excuse and re-label sin as something other than rebellion. Simple points of rebellion are tolerated and given place in the lives of multiplied thousands of Christians every day.

There is nothing more numbing to a humble, ongoing, child-like repentance than the rationalizing of rebellion against the voice of God. You can never snowball the Holy Spirit. It will never work. He’s the Spirit of Truth. Whitewashing over rebellion, even in what we might define as some small compromise, will gradually shrivel up your soul and your joy and confidence before the Lord.

In my heart I know when the Lord says, **“Don, you are not to do that anymore.”** Or, **“Don, this has now got to change.”** Or, **“Don, you still haven’t learned to submit to Me in this area of your life. I’m calling you to fresh trust and obedience.”**

And it’s what I do at that point. It’s what I **do** once I **perceive with my mind** what the Holy Spirit is saying. Because the Holy Spirit never speaks merely to provide **information**. His voice is a **moral** voice. It comes bring the repentant heart the ability to obey.

That means there is no **justifiable ground for resisting or arguing with the Spirit**. He is there for my good - **always** for my ultimate good. Remember, His will for my life is what I would immediately choose if I had all the facts. That’s the life-giving response of the repentant heart.

More on this vital subject next Sunday night.