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LEAVING THE PAST BEHIND

The Nature of Repentance (2 Corinthians 7:1-14)

Bottom Line: True repentance is God-wrought sorrow over our sin that results in salvation.

How would you define repentance? How would most people in our community define repentance?

What is the result of genuine repentance? What is the result of repentance that is not genuine? What does a life lived in a posture of repentance look like?

Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of that sin, and a sincere commitment to turn from it and walk in obedience to Christ. Being a Christ-follower isn't just a matter of thinking and doing the right things and avoiding the wrong things. Foundational to being a Christian is a personal relationship with Jesus that empowers you to live for God and make decisions out of the leading of the Holy Spirit. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, we are led to repentance because we desperately want to keep the intimacy of our relationship with God, not simply because of a need to behave rightly.

Read 2 Corinthians 7:1-9.

Paul spent 18 months in Corinth helping establish the church. He visited the church multiple times afterward, teaching and rebuking them to pursue holiness. Second Corinthians is Paul's most pastoral letter of all his epistles. We learn in First Corinthians that the church had resisted his teaching and it was a painful process for Paul to continue to rebuke their sin and call for repentance, especially in the face of accusations and doubts of Paul's authority.

What does Paul call the church to focus on in verse 1? How does focusing on these promises help us repent (refer to 6:16-18)?

Why do you think Paul struggled emotionally to call the Corinthians to repentance? Have you ever approached someone else about the need to repent from sin? If so, what lessons did you learn from that experience?

How do you normally respond when someone points out the sin in your life? Do you have friends that you invite to hold you accountable?

How would people who do not know Jesus respond if you rebuked their sin? How should we, as Christians, respond when someone rebukes us?

Read 2 Corinthians 7:10-14.

Paul continues to outline the characteristics of genuine repentance. God requires godly sorrow over sin, not worldly sorrow that brings about no change in our lives. Godly sorrow is characterized by a commitment to forsake that sin and walk in obedience to God. Paul points out that even though his letter was painful to read, it brought about salvation. It's always painful to bring up someone's sin, but the potential payoff will always be worth it.

Scripture puts repentance and faith together as two aspects of the one act of coming to Christ for salvation. When we turn to Christ for salvation, we turn away from the sin that we are asking

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Jesus to save us from. Initial saving faith and repentance occur only once—when we ask Jesus to be the absolute Lord of our lives—but it is not the only time that these should be characteristic of who we are. Faith and genuine repentance are a daily posture of our heart in our relationship with God.

What two types of sorrow does Paul discuss in verse 10? How have you seen each of these?

What are the fruits of godly sorrow listed in verse 11? What fruits have you seen in your life or in the life of those around you that are a result of a godly perspective of sin? When it comes to sin, what is the difference between recognition and repentance?

Have you experienced a time when you or someone you know was remorseful but not repentant? How could you tell the difference? What was the end result of that experience?

Why do we find repentance to be so difficult? At what times in your life have you experienced genuine repentance? What steps did you take to turn to Christ and not continue to fall into that sin?

Reflection: The reflection this week is a little different. Read Psalm 51, and discuss the questions related to repentance.

Psalm 51 is an example of genuine repentance. This psalm was written soon after David had slept with Bathsheba and sent her husband to the front lines of battle to cover up his sin. David was king and didn't want anyone to find out about his sin, so he continued to sin in order to avoid confronting his original sin (see 2 Samuel 10–12). Nathan the prophet approached David and rebuked him of his sin in 2 Samuel 12, but David did not admit his sin initially. Nathan's rebuke helped David realize his need to turn from his sin and back to obedience of God. Psalm 51 relays David's prayer of repentance to God and characterizes the heart posture of genuine faith and repentance. God desires that we take up this posture in our own lives so that we may have intimacy with Him.

Read Psalm 51

To what attributes of God does David stake his request for forgiveness? How had David experienced these characteristics of God before? Which request of David's do you identify with the most? Why? In verse 13, how did restoration change the way that David saw other people? How often do we avoid confronting our sin?

What can you do today to take up a posture of faith and genuine repentance? How can we remind ourselves daily to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal sin and bring us to genuine repentance?

Think of David's prayer in Psalm 51. What attitudes of the heart do you need to develop that are like David's? What promises of God do you need to focus on to remind you that intimacy with God comes from a right relationship with Him?