

PREPARE TO RECEIVE THE LORD OUR GOD

Golden Text:

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. (Hebrews 6:1-2)

Lesson Text

Isaiah 40:3

(3) The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way

of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

I. HOW ESSENTIAL IS REPENTANCE TO BEGINNING A NEW LIFE IN CHRIST?

We cannot begin a new life in Christ without first turning from our old life of sin. Repentance is the inner transition from self-dependence and self-government to submission to God. The kingdom of God means having someone rule over us — having a real King. We cannot crown Jesus Lord of our lives in practical experience through the assistance of the Holy Spirit in the realm of repentance. Calling Jesus "Lord" with full biblical meaning requires the renouncing of self-rule or imagined "independence." It includes the acknowledgment that we are finished with the way we have been living and are ready to embrace his new life. This transference of dependence was

considered so basic in the New Testament that every major teacher introduced the gospel with the necessity of repentance.

"Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:21)

A. John The Baptist.

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:1-2)

B. Jesus Himself.

"From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17)

"Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." (Mark 1:14-15)

C. St. Luke.

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:" (Acts 17:30)

D. The Twelve Disciples.

"And they went out, and preached that men should repent." (Mark 6:12)

E. Apostle Paul.

"But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." (Acts 26:20)

"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:12-14)

F. Apostle Peter.

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (II Peter 3:9)

Both the Lord's "great commission" to his disciples, and their application of this commission, emphasize repentance.

"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke 24:47)

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38)

II. IS REPENTANCE ONLY AN INITIAL EXPERIENCE?

Laying the foundation of repentance from dead works includes, first of all, the initial repentance which turns us from darkness to light. We see ourselves as sinners in God's sight and acknowledge this. We turn from our life of sin to God. But repentance is like a door into a whole new world of repentance. As we come to know God's love and holiness more and more, we see ourselves increasingly in need of change. Acknowledgment of our need to amend, and sorrow for being unlike God in character is a continuing part of repentance. The Lord Jesus continues to examine us for evidence of repentance today. We notice, for example, in the book of Revelation, Jesus is

walking in the midst of seven local churches. To five out of the seven, he warns them that he must see repentance on their part, or they will experience severe loss. The distinguishing factor of initial repentance is this: We first repent for what we are — sinners; after this we repent for what we do or fail to do — specific sins.

A. Ephesus.

"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." (Revelation 2:5)

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." (Revelation 2:7)

B. Pergamos.

"Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." (Revelation 2:16)

C. Thyatira.

"And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds." (Revelation 2:21-22)

"And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works." (Revelation 2:23)

D. Sardis.

"Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not

watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." (Revelation 3:3)

E. Laodicea.

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth." (Revelation 3:15-16)

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." (Revelation 3:19)

III. WHY MUST REPENTANCE PRECEDE ANY OTHER FOUNDATION?

Repentance is the preparation of our hearts for God. Before God can build in our lives, he must first clear away the debris and clutter. Before he can plant good seed, he must remove the weeds. Otherwise we will always be a mixture. The seeds of sin will choke the good seed.

A. Repentance Eliminates Our Inner Deviousness, Enabling Us To Come Into Direct Contact With God.

"Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you." (Proverbs 1:23)

"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3)

Until repentance has done a complete work, we avoid being fully open and direct with God about our need. We hide behind excuses and erect defenses to keep ourselves from knowing what is really going on inside. But repentance clears away all lies and rationalizing, and we are then able to call sin sin, and allow God to come to the heart of our need. We welcome his remaking of our inner landscaping.

"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall

be made straight, and the rough places plain:" (Isaiah 40:3-4)

B. Repentance Cleanses The "Land Of Our Heart" From Bad Seeds.

It is not enough to cut down the bad plants of external sin; the roots must be pulled and the seeds must be destroyed. Land which has not been cultivated must be cleared by repeated plowing; once is not enough. Such fallow ground (uncultivated land) must undergo successful plowing to break up all hard clods and to deeply purge the soil of all remaining seeds dropped by birds or brought by the wind. Neglected land does not become a desert, but a wilderness. It grows bad seed if not used for good seed. This is what the prophet Jeremiah was talking about when he said:

"For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem:" (Jeremiah 4:3-4)

C. Repentance Digs Down Deep To Establish Foundations Of Solid Rock.

The taller a building, the deeper the foundation. The foundation must support the entire structure. For this reason, God does not attempt to build his new life upon our surface habits alone; he insists on stripping us to our base, and beginning "from scratch," as they say. Jeremiah's call as a prophet of repentance emphasizes the necessity of the destructive work of God before the building can begin.

"Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." (Jeremiah 1:9-10)

IV. HOW DOES REPENTANCE DIFFER FROM REFORMATION?

Reformation deals only with the surface; repentance is a change of heart. During the history of the nation Israel, the prophets were constantly calling for a thorough repentance from idolatry and a return to God. Under

several of the kings, Judah experienced reformation. The idols were cut down and certain idolatrous practices, abominations to the Lord, were eliminated. But the people's hearts were not turned to God. Their affections were not captivated by him alone. While things looked good on the outside, they were doing the same things inside in subtle, disguised ways. But God is always concerned with the heart, the root of our conduct. Sinners can quit smoking and drinking and the like, but this does not make genuine new creatures.

Hosea the prophet paints a vivid picture of the difference between reformation and repentance when he urges the people not to merely plant new seeds, but to plow fresh ground. In other words, prepare the way for God's word. Jesus said much the same thing in his famous parable of the sower.

"Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD; till he come and rain righteousness upon you. Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men." (Hosea 10:12-13)

V. WHAT KIND OF FRUIT WILL A REPENTANT HEART BRING FORTH?

We call it repentance "unto life" because it is just that. We turn from dead works, from the futility of our own efforts to achieve righteousness. God gives us his own life. Stimulated by this new life, we bring forth fruit of Christ-likeness. We produce in our own lives his character. His seed and his life will grow up like himself. This is called "the fruit of the Spirit," which is the result of our union with him. Jesus periodically checks the fruit in our lives, just as he did in the case of the fig tree (Matthew 21:19). If our root has been changed, this will show in the fruit of our character.

"But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)

A. Love (Agape).

God sheds his own love in our hearts by his Spirit. This is a self-giving love, demonstrated both in devotion to God and in concern for his people.

B. Joy.

God's Spirit shares Christ's own joy and gladness with us. This inner rejoicing is not dependent upon circumstances, but gives us the ability to bounce back in resiliency when pressures pile upon us.

C. Peace.

What the world must find in tranquilizers and other artificial means for producing relaxation, the Spirit does within us. This inner peace also makes for concord, or harmony, in relationships and unity in the assembly.

D. Longsuffering.

Longsuffering is exactly that. A better word is perhaps patience, or fortitude. It is the ability to endure in expectancy of God's help. It is slowness in avenging ourselves of injuries, and forbearance because we hope in God.

E. Gentleness.

We are obliging and easy to work with because of the Spirit's work in us, making us agreeable where most people would be touchy and ornery.

F. Goodness (Agathos).

This is more than the absence of evil; it is positive virtue. It makes us generous in attitude and profitable to the kingdom. We are morally upright but we also have blessings to impart.

G. Faith or Faithfulness.

Because we are at rest inside through the Spirit's in-working and possess a firm assurance and confidence toward God, we are able to deal with others in good faith. And we are known for faithfulness and truthfulness in all our dealings.

H. Meekness.

Meekness is not weakness, or Moses would not have been cited as the meekest man on the Earth. It is the ability to remain mild and gentle and forgiving under trying circumstances. It requires more strength to not react, than to react.

I. Temperance.

Self-mastery is the result of discipline, but this is only successful when stimulated by the indwelling Spirit. Self control grows out of a genuine relationship with God through the Spirit.

"Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;" (II Corinthians 9:10)

CONVINCED BEYOND ALL DOUBT

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Lesson Text Hebrews 11:1-6

(1) Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

(2) For by it the elders obtained a good report.

(3) Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

(4) By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that

he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

(5) By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

(6) But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

I. THE BINDING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REPENTANCE AND FAITH.