

Reconciling with One Another: Repentance

Selected Scriptures

January 15, 2017

All right, we're going to wrap up another short little series we've been doing. This one on reconciling relationships. If you've been with us over the past couple of weeks, we've had a good time just trying to get into a bit of a topical approach to the confession of sin, asking for forgiveness, granting forgiveness, and those kind of things and it's been, it's been really helpful for me as a reminder. The Lord has been so gracious to provide me opportunity throughout this series to confess my sin to people that I've offended and to seek their forgiveness as well. And so I trust that's going on in your life, and I'm not the only one. But I hope this, this series has been useful to you and helpful for you in reconciling relationships because the point of all this is to please God, to glorify God, and to reconcile with him, and then to one another. Sin continues to be a reality in this fallen world, and so we need to understand how to deal with sin, how to reconcile

relationships, and how to protect the precious gift of unity that we have been given here, this gift of unity and harmony that we're enjoying in this church.

So we've talked so far about confessing our sins to one another, then going and seeking forgiveness, granting forgiveness to one another. But in a series on reconciling relationships, we'd be incomplete and remiss if we didn't talk about, we'd be woefully inadequate in a series like this if we didn't talk about, also, the necessity of personal repentance. Personal repentance. We kind of want to work through some of that today.

However, before we go on and develop that subject of repentance, I want to deal with a few questions that always come up whenever we talk about this subject of forgiveness. I actually left you last time hanging with a couple teaser questions about this issue of forgiveness, and so I want to satisfy maybe an interest or a concern that was raised last time. And here are, just several questions in no particular order, but here's the first question. When you forgive someone, what

are you actually saying to them when you say, I forgive you? What commitment are you making when you forgive? To do, to explain this, I'd like to unpack for you just a few of the words of Scripture that will help you to understand a little bit more clearly what forgiveness actually is, and what you're doing when you forgive. There are three Greek words that are translated forgive. The first Greek word is the word *aphiemi*, which means to let go, to send away, okay? That's *aphiemi*, send away. That's a concept of forgiveness you want to keep in mind. Second word is *apoluo*, which is really, literally, to loose from. There's the *apo*, which is a preposition, from, and then the verb *luo*, to loose. So to loose from, it means to release, to set free, to pardon, to set loose. The third word is probably my favorite word because it contains this concept of grace. The word, grace, is the word *charis* in the Greek, and that's really at the heart of God's forgiveness of us, is this concept of grace. It's the word *charizomai*, which, which contains grace, *charis*. One of the meanings within that semantic range of *charizomai* is to cancel, and it's the concept of a debt remission. There's a canceling of the debt. There's a forgiveness or a pardon.

So those are the, those are the Greek ideas. There's sending away, there's cutting loose, releasing. There's canceling debt. Those are all great pictures of what it means to forgive, and what we're doing when we say, I forgive you. Also, a couple of Hebrew words translated, forgive. Two Hebrew words I'd like to point out, there's a contrast, actually, between these two. The first word is *salach*, and it means, to cover or to pardon. That verb, *salach*, it's used only in relation to God, never in relation to people forgiving one another. That's not a verb that's for us. Only God can truly forgive or cover or pardon sin. So that's the Hebrew idea; it's teaching us that only God can pardon sin. That is never in our purview, that's never our prerogative because remember, as we taught last time, I think it was, we're not the law-giver, we're not the judge. So we cannot fully and finally pardon somebody from their sin. It's with God and God alone that there's forgiveness, Psalm 130.4. There's pardon, there's covering. Why? "So that he may be feared." Remember that verse?

The second word, though, does apply to both God and man in forgiving. It's the word *nasa*, and it means to, to lift up, as with like a heavy burden. Picture somebody walking with this

massive burden on their back, and you lift that burden up and then you send that thing away. You carry it away. That's another idea. That's what God has done with our sin, in fact. David prayed in Psalm 25:18, "Consider my affliction and my trouble; forgive," or carry away, "all my sins." Psalm 32.1, that Josh started us out with this morning, "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven." Blessed is the one whose offenses against a holy God are carried away completely. That's the idea. Heavy burden of our guilt has been lifted up from us, our conscience is thereby released, and we're set free from the debt of offense against God. And in a derivative sense of that, that is what we're doing when we forgive one another. We're releasing that person of that sense of indebtedness that they have to us for the offense that they've committed. We're setting them free. We're sending away the offense. And, by the way, as we do that, we're setting ourselves free as well, aren't we? We're releasing ourselves from the pain or the sense of harboring that or that embitteredness we can feel. When Joseph's brothers came to him in Genesis 50:17, they said, they used his word, this word *nasa*, is "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin because they did evil to you." They recognized their need to go to Joseph and ask him to forgive them. Release us. Release us.

So putting all that together, when you grant somebody forgiveness, you're saying, I release this thing. I pardon you. I set you free from any sense of obligation to me. And with those words of forgiveness, you have declared the matter of any outstanding guilt to be settled. It's done, as far as you're concerned, right? But now, let's be honest. Here's where we are going to face a new challenge, right? It's the temptation that comes to us to resurrect that offense. After we have declared a person forgiven and released as far as we're concerned, we're tempted to become hurt and angry and offended and embittered all over again as we remember, right? The devil hates the reality of forgiveness. He wants to tempt you to hold on to your anger, to stoke those feelings of pain and hurt, feelings that lead to hatred. And hatred, obviously, is an internal heart sin that really is tantamount to murdering somebody. That's, that's what's going on, and the devil hates us to forgive one another; he doesn't want us to release one another. He wants us to be bound up, tied up by the sense of anger. And your remaining sin nature will stir within you, remembering and rehearsing that offense and enticing you to harbor an unforgiving spirit toward somebody else, even, maybe even especially, after you have

forgiven somebody else. Don't do it. It's just more bondage for you.

As God promised Israel, in New Covenant promises of which we partake in the church age, he said in Jeremiah 31:34, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." That's a New Covenant promise that applies to us as well, according to Hebrews 8:12 and Hebrews 10:17 because of the redemption that Christ accomplished for us on the cross. God has pardoned all of our iniquities. He's chosen to remember our sins no more. Does this mean forgive and forget? Does this mean that's what we're supposed to do, that God has literally forgotten our sins? Based on his forgetting our sins, are we supposed to forget the sins that other people commit against us?

Well, let's unpack that a little bit. Has God literally forgotten? No. Because God is omniscient, and that means it's impossible for him to ever literally forget anything. But notice what it says there in Jeremiah 31:34 and also repeated in the New Testament, "I will remember their sin no more." That is to say, God, it's not that he forgets or he lacks information. It's

that he makes a conscious choice not to remember. It's, it's saying he is not going to hold our sins to our account. He's not going to hold us liable for our sins. He has cancelled that debt. He has released us. He has pardoned us. That's what David has said in Psalm 103:11-12, "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him, and as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." That's he means. And that's what we need to practice and endeavor to practice with one another. We choose to not remember the sins that we have forgiven, to not rehearse them, to not relive the hurt and the offense. So we make a decision not to bring it up, not to bring it up with them, not to bring it up with other people, definitely not to gossip about it. But in love, when we forgive, we're going to cover over that offense, that we're going to choose not to remember it, which means we're going to choose not to think about it. And because we are not like God, we are mutable, we are changing creatures, that means, thankfully, that we eventually will forget. If we continue to choose not to think about it, not to remember it, not to rehearse it, eventually our minds just lose sight of it, which is a blessed thing. I can't remember how many people have come to me asking for forgiveness for something they've done, and I don't remember it at all. I'm

like, Oh, hey, I'm glad to forgive you because I don't feel a thing. I forgive it."

So while it's not a forgive and forgive attitude, it is a forgive and choose not to remember attitude, which is patterned after God's forgiveness of our sins. He chooses not to remember, but you always want to be on guard and watch out for the devil's tendency to tempt you to take that thing back. You need to treat that temptation to remember and rehearse a sin that somebody's committed against you. You need to treat that like a temptation, the temptation it is. It's a solicitation of your mind and your heart. It's a pernicious evil, and you need to follow Christ's admonition to his disciples in Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation." That is, be on your guard and watch. Be watchful, knowing the ambush is coming. Be watchful and then pray that you won't enter into temptation.

Now before I preach an entirely different sermon on fighting temptation, let's move on to a second question. When we grant forgiveness, does that mean that the sin has no impact on the relationships? That is to say, are we expected, when someone

comes and asks forgiveness and we grant forgiveness, are we basically expected to basically wipe the slate clean, as if that sin never existed? Are we to pretend it never happened? Well, let me begin by answering this question, which is complex, but let me say as much as possible and in most cases, forgiveness means you're going to pursue that very thing, to not even treat that relationship as if it's ever happened. You're going to pursue unity and harmony with the one who has sinned against you, and that is the mandate for all of us Christians. Ephesians 4:3 says we're to "be eager to maintain unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." Now that may not mean that you two become the best of friends, but then again, you might. You might. The power of forgiveness is so incredible, and especially so when you witness two former enemies become close, intimate friends because the love of Christ is so powerfully at work in that relationship.

Consider yourself with a holy God. I mean, an infinite gulf existed between you and God. You were once his enemy, like the song says, but now you've been made what? His friend. He has made you his friend. And there's not lack on his part, no, no with, withholding on his part. He gives himself completely and fully to us. Where's the lack? It's in us. We need to grow in

our relationship with him. We need to grow in our trust, in our faith, in our coming near to him and embracing him. So that power of forgiveness is at work in us with God. That same power of forgiveness can be at work in us as well.

The reality, though, is that sin has consequences, right? Consequences like broken trust, like damaged credibility, and trust and credibility take time to restore, to build back in any relationship. So forgiveness does not mean that we set about pretending that something never happened. But it does mean that we do take responsibility on our own to work diligently to pursue unity and harmony with that other person, especially the one who offended us. We realize the full, the full realization of any reconciled relationship takes time. It takes time to restore credibility. It takes time to restore trust.

There are some more difficult and complex cases, though, where it's pretty reasonable, or I should say unreasonable, let me put it in the negative, it's unreasonable to expect an offender and an offended person to wipe that slate clean and act like nothing happened. In some cases, you simply can't do that.

In some extreme cases, it would be actually criminal to do so. Yes, Christians must confess their sins to one another. They seek forgiveness from those they've offended. Christians have a responsibility, then, to forgive those who've offended them. But sin has consequences, and some sins have severe and long-lasting consequences. We need to use some common sense when we work out reconciliation. We need to be very careful and very wise in sensitive matters, especially in cases that involve sexual sin or in cases of violence, when there's been harm committed against vulnerable people, especially against women or children. Reconcile? Yes. Confess sins, seek forgiveness, grant forgiveness? Yes. But we also have a responsibility to protect the weak and the vulnerable from those who are prone to do them harm. If you need me to spell that out, come ask me after the service, or better yet ask a law enforcement officer because they know exactly what I'm talking about. They are so helpful. The law is so helpful in these matters, and following legal procedures are gonna help people, keep people safe from those who would have potential to harm them.

Here's the third question, I have been forgiven for my sin by the one I've offended, but what if I can't forgive myself?

You ever heard that? I realize it's a pretty common thought, a pretty common sentiment. But it actually comes from the psychological language of a, of a secular age, the age of therapy in which human autonomy is the only authority to which we're accountable. We're told to forgive ourselves as if we are the authority, as if we're the law-giver and the judge, and we have the power and the authority to grant forgiveness of ourselves. We do not. So the answer to this question, What if I can't forgive myself? is actually quite simple because all this requires is a better understanding of the theology of forgiveness, and then believing the truth about forgiveness, to find full release from this sense of guilt and shame over our sin, because that is what that feeling is. What if I can't forgive myself? It means, what you're saying is, I still feel the shame over this guilt of my sin. So let me just repeat, since you're neither the law-giver nor the judge, you really have no power, certainly no right to forgive yourself. God is the only law-giver and judge, and get this, that's a good thing because if he says, I will forgive you whenever you confess your sins to men, as he clearly does in 1 John 1:9, you know what? You simply need to believe that. If you're still feeling ashamed of sin you've committed, just keep revisiting that verse. Just keep rehearsing the wonderful and amazing grace in the promise

of 1 John 1:9. Meditate on its Gospel-infused truths. Ask God to help you believe it, embrace it, understand it. Go deeper in your understanding, maybe, of the cross, than you've ever been before, to understand what it cost God to forgive you and realize that no amount of your suffering or self-pity or any amount of your penance or anything else you might want to do, no amount of that is actually going to add to the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Your sense of forgiveness and your feelings of being forgiven, they're tied directly to the strength of your faith in God's promise. So the more you trust him, the more you take him at his word, the stronger you believe him, then your feelings will eventually follow. Pray. Ask him to help you with that very thing.

One more question, a fourth question, which will move us into our subject for today. In cases of repeated offenses, where you need to keep on forgiving that person who keeps coming back to you, having committed the same sin. They're starting to reach their seventy-times-seven limit, right? Over and over and over, is it reasonable to expect that person to deal with his issues and to stop sinning? Or do you need to simply keep on enduring the offenses, keep on forgiving, keep on turning the other

cheek, and when you run out of cheeks, offer some other body part to him? Another way to ask the question is, does reconciliation involve any expectation of future accountability? Let me give you the simple, bottom-line answer, Yes. Seeking forgiveness, granting forgiveness, there is an expectation of accountability. There is an expectation of change. It is reasonable to expect Christians to change; that is, after all, what the Gospel tells us it will do to us. It changes us from enemies to friends. It changes us from aliens and strangers to now adopted children in God's family. There's the first change, and after that change, this change of a new nature. There's the old nature that is dead and gone, and there's a new nature in us, and that new nature does not act the same as it did before. Yes, Christians change. And so it is reasonable to expect Christians to change, to stop sinning and to walk in righteousness.

What about non-Christians? Different kettle of fish, isn't it? We expect non-Christians are going to continue in their sin. They are going to keep on offending us because they're unregenerate, and they are still enslaved to an old nature, and that's why, whenever you find people who profess Christ but they

continue in those same old sins, never really making any reasonable change, there is good reason to question that person's profession of faith. And perhaps your love should take a different approach to that person, and you need to start evangelizing them instead of expecting them to walk in a righteousness that they have never been introduced to. That's very frustrating for the person on the other end of that. When they have no mechanism inside of them to change because they're not Christians. They've grown up in a weak evangelicalism that has given them a false gospel and a false assurance of their faith, and they profess to be Christians, but they're never changing. They're never growing; they're never loving Christ more. They're never displaying any of the fruits of the Spirit. And you keep on harping on them because they're not. Well, maybe what you ought to do is take a different approach and say, you know what? Maybe it's the fact that this is another one of those that the Bible calls a false professor, a false convert, and maybe I need to see them in that category and love them instead by evangelizing them.

But for Christians, it is absolutely reasonable to expect Christians to repent of their sin and to walk righteously before

God. And it is not judgmental to confront sin, folks. It's loving. It's kind. Why? Because no true Christian wants to keep on sinning. Every single one of us who are saved, we hate our sin, don't we? And the more we understand about the cross of Jesus Christ and what it cost God to forgive us, the more it makes us abhor ourselves that we would ever commit any sin that would put him on the cross. And so, folks, we're thankful to one another, aren't we, when we point out each other's sin and help each other repent? No true Christian wants to keep sinning. The mark of a regenerate person is a desire to repent and to change and to walk in righteousness, right?

So let's expand this thought and dive into our outline for this morning, which should be there in your bulletin. The crowning action of reconciling relationships is in this issue of repentance. This, here, this repentance, is the proof of our express desire to be reconciled with somebody else. Those who truly want to reconcile, they not only want to confess their sins and ask for forgiveness and grant forgiveness to one another, but most importantly, they want to stop sinning against each other, don't they? That is the joy of living in repentance, that we get to put off sin and put on righteousness. So there

are the three outline points in your bulletin. Repentance is number one, is the essence of the Christian life. Number two: It's the evidence of an unseen faith, and number three: It's the outworking of godly sorrow. Repentance is all that, and let's jump right into the first point.

Repentance is really the essence of the Christian life. As Christians in pursuit of personal holiness, repentance is and should be a regular, normal characteristic pattern of our daily lives. We sin, and we don't want to sin. We offend God and others, and we don't want to do that. So we're constantly occupied with this issue of repentance. We're renewing our minds through God's Word. We're putting off old behaviors. We're putting on new ones. And I just want in this point, this outline point, to read a few Scriptures to set a foundation for the rest of our study and I'd invite you to turn to each one of these passages just so you can read them for yourselves. Let's start with Romans chapter 12 verses 1 and 2. Romans 12:1-2. Paul has just spent eleven chapters unpacking for the Roman Christians this Gospel that he has been preaching throughout the span of his apostolic ministry. Paul is seeking their support as he extends his missionary outreach into Spain, and so he wants them

to know this Gospel that he's preaching. So after eleven chapters of Gospel, he talks then, about the implications of the Gospel on their day-to-day lives. Look at Romans 12:1-2, "I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God." What are those? Eleven chapters of reading will help you understand those, okay? "I appeal to you, brothers, therefore, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual," or reasonable, or logical, "worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Great memory verse. Great AWANA verse, isn't it? In its essence, though, that verse 2 right there is a description of repentance. You should think of repentance really in directional terms; that is, you're repenting *from* something, you're leaving something behind and you're repenting *to* something. You leave something behind: a behavior, a way of, of thinking, a pattern of speech, or whatever, and you're pursuing an altogether different pattern, different way of thinking. Or to put the matter plainly, you're turning away from sin and pursuing

holiness. In this case, Romans 12:1-2, you're turning away from conformity to this world. You're pursuing mind renewal. You're pursuing maturity in the practical discernment of the will of God. This is an entirely different lifestyle that Paul is after, here. It's based on the new orientation you've been given as a Christian. You understand that your life is no longer your own. It's now, verse 1, "a living sacrifice." What is a sacrifice? It's something fundamentally you let go of, right? Sacrifice it, your time, your, your life, your resources, even your thought life. All of it belongs to God; it does not belong to you. Let's be clear: Living that out is the continual battle of the Christian life, right? Most of us don't really realize how much we are conformed to this world. We're born into this world, we grow up; just like a fish swimming in water doesn't know it's wet, we grow up in this world not knowing how infused we are and surrounded we are in drinking in, breathing in, breathing out, a sinful way of thinking. We fail to think deeply enough about the Scripture, which means we don't recognize how desperately we need this mind-renewal and this life-transformation. We're too easily satisfied, too easy and quick to excuse ourselves for spiritual laziness and sloth. We need to repent continually, pursue what Paul described as "the obedience of the Gentiles" in his Gospel.

It should be obvious how that affects our relationships with one another, right? So much of our sin springs from worldly thinking applied to relationships. You just keep on thinking in a worldly way, and you're going to do worldly things with one another, and it's going to hurt people. That is what sin is. But if we're transformed by the renewing of our minds, the life of Christ shining through our transformed character is going to become such a source of joy and blessing to one another.

Let's look at another passage. Turn in your Bibles to the right, to the book of Ephesians, the book of Ephesians, chapter 4, and you can land on verse 17. This passage here, verses 17-19, it describes this continual fight that every Christian has, no matter how long you've been in Christ, this is the heart of the battle, the face of the battle. Ephesians 4:17-19, Paul says, "Now I say this and testify in the Lord that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their heart. They've become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of

impurity." That right there, when he says, no longer walk that way, that's the putting off part of repentance. It has to do with the fallen nature, the fallen mentality. That right there describes the world we live in, right? That's the mentality, though, that all of us were saved from. Even if you were saved at five years old, you were saved from that mentality. Before you turned five, you were "darkened in your understanding, alienated from the life of God." A cute little four-year-old, but you were that right there. You just didn't have enough life to express yourself. Some of us had time to express ourselves in that way, and it's become a source of shame to us as we remember those days. This is what we need to be saved from. We need to abandon that as a lifestyle.

A number of you have been Christians for a long time, decades in fact. But listen, if you're not constantly and diligently in pursuit of repentance and mind-renewal and life-transformation, even you will fall back into this worldly way of thinking. And that's why Paul commands us, Don't do that! He's warning you that you can fall backward. If you're not pursuing a lifestyle of repentance, your mind can become clouded by futile thinking, shrouded in darkness and ignorance. You can become

hard-hearted and calloused, even sensual and impure if it goes on long enough.

So Paul has written this as a warning. He's commanding Christians in verse 17, that they must no longer walk that way. They must no longer live that way. Instead, they're to work out repentance. Look at verses 25-32. They're to cast aside old behaviors and adopt an entirely way of living. It's the regenerate lifestyle of truth-telling in verse 25, of keeping short accounts and keeping your anger from turning into sinful anger, verses 26-27. It's, it's hard work in generosity, verse 28. It's edifying speech in verse 29. It's the outworking of lovingkindness, forgiveness, and tenderheartedness in verses 30-32. That right there is the lifestyle of a Christian. All that is based on a change that's taken place inside of us. Look at verses 20-24. Paul says, "That's not the way you learned Christ." He's pointing back to the Gentile way. "That's not the way you learned Christ, assuming that you have heard about him, were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life, and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the

spirit of your minds. You are to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Here's the argument: Since you have put off the old self, that's what happened at salvation, the old nature killed, sacrificed, crucified on the cross with Christ. You have put on the old self, and you are being spiritually renewed, present tense, and you have put on the new self, that is, you're a new nature now, you're to have a new orientation. And your new orientation is one of utter hostility against the old self, aggressive antipathy toward your old nature, toward old habits, toward old thinking. On the other hand, you're to embrace this zealous pursuit toward Christ-likeness. You want to see the reality of the new creation, which it says there in verse 24, "is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." You want to see that new creation reality exposed. You want it to be seen with increasing regularity, with increasing frequency, with increasing intensity. Why? Because you want to see God glorified. It's not about you. It's about him being known and seen in the way you live your life. You're not satisfied with mediocrity. You're not satisfied with merely a form of religion. You want to see God's power on display. You

want to see his glory revealed in your life because you love him. He's the author, the finisher of your salvation. He's the kind and generous benefactor who's granted you everything in Christ. So you want to see others come to know and love him, too. You realize that starts with you. That starts with the way you live your life, which is based on how you think, which is fundamentally a matter of outworking of personal repentance.

All right, just quickly, one more passage. Go to Colossians, chapter 3, Colossians 3:5. We're just going to hurry through this one because there are other things we need to get to, here. Paul begins that amazing chapter, verses 1-4, calling for Christians to "set their minds on things above," where Christ is, where their life is now hidden in Christ. Our minds need to be so heavenly-minded, we can be, so we can be of some earthly good, right? Here's the way that happens, starting in verse 5. "Put to death." That's really harsh language; yes it is! "Put to death," kill, mortify, slaughter, destroy, "therefore, what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these, you too once walked when you were living in them, but now you must put

them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another seeing that you have put, "on the old self with its, or, "off the old self with its practices, and put on the new self, which is being renewed in the knowledge after the image of its creator." Sounds very much like Ephesians 4, doesn't it?

Paul begins with a negative side. He tells us what we're to repent of, what we're to leave behind. Romans 12: It's conformity to the world. Ephesians 4: It's the Gentile walk. Here in Colossians, it's mortify, it's put to death all your sins. And when you're committed to killing those sins in your life, there is going to be a noticeably positive effect on your relationships. Why? Because it's those heart sins that are the source of all of our broken relationships. James 4:1-2 says, "What causes quarrels and fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel." Listen, if you'll take the time, I'll bet you can boil down every argument in your life down to sins like this and see them in your own heart. This is the source of quarrels and

fighting among you. That's why Paul says, Colossians 3:5-10, Mortify them, kill them.

Instead, put on Christ-likeness. Look at chapter 3 verses 12 through 15. "Put on, then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgiving each other. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body and be thankful." The pattern of Christian living represented in those verses, that's achieved through a progressive lifestyle of personal repentance. It's a daily habit of putting off the sins of verses 5-10 and putting on the virtues of verses 12-15. From the very moment of salvation, we're on a path of repentance, which puts on us a trajectory of increasing conformity to those virtues which is Christ-likeness.

Now I took the time to read through those different passages not because I know you don't know them, but because you

do know them and because I want to remind you that this series on relationships, it is not isolated from this over-arching responsibility that we have as Christians to grow in Christ. This is how we grow in Christ. It's manifest in the relationships we have with one another. We're not merely trying to fix broken relationships. That is way too low of a goal. Rather, we're trying to walk righteously before God. That's the issue. Pleasing the Lord, that is the heart issue. And when we pursue that goal, we're going to be rightly related to God, and then the fruit of pleasing the Lord and being rightly related to God is healthy, growing, maturing relationships with other people as well. There's real change, here. There's real power. It doesn't leave us unaffected. We're not the same as we've always been. We are altered as Christians. We're different in a good way. And the fruit of this lifestyle of repentance, it ought to be seen happening in all of our relationships.

Husbands, you should be growing in your role as a husband, so your wife isn't dealing with the same kind of man you have been since the very beginning of your marriage. Sins you brought into the marriage, the sins you had at your wedding should be decreasing in frequency and intensity. If they're going in the

other direction, that's a problem. You ought to be increasing in your leadership, increasing in your teaching, increasing in your understanding of God's Word so that you explain that to your wife and to your kids and to everybody around you. You're a man, after all, and God has designed you and chosen you to be a leader and a teacher in whatever realm he's given you to exercise those gifts. Wives, same thing for you. The fruit of your spiritual growth should be noticeable to your husband and to your children. The intimacy of all those relationships in the home means those at home are going to be able to see your growth or lack of growth. They're going to be able to see that more clearly than anybody else because it's an intimate setting.

Same thing with relationships within the church among the body of Christ. Year after year, we should be growing in our relationships with one another. And as we look back over the years, there should be marked growth, noticeable change. I realize from one week to the next you feel like it's like one step forward, two steps back, and you've blown it yet again. But I'll tell you, if you look back over five years, over ten years, there ought to be a change in your trajectory. There should be an increase of Christ-likeness that's evident in homes and even

among our membership. Again, we're not talking about perfection, here. We don't, we don't attain that until we go to heaven. We are talking about direction, and our trajectory of growth should be apparent to other people as well. If it's not evident, something is out of order; something's wrong.

I hope you can see how the emphasis on repentance is essential to this subject of reconciliation. When we're trying to work out repentance in some issue in our lives, this is going to give legitimacy to our confession of sin. It's going to infuse our request for forgiveness with a strong dose of personal integrity. Our commitment to repentance, it shows others that our stated desire to reconcile with them, it's not a sham. It's genuine. Our commitment to repentance, it helps restore our broken credibility, helps in rebuilding our broken integrity in the sight of the person we've offended, hurt with our sin. After all, if we're not repentant, if we have no intention of changing, that really creates more fundamental questions about where we are with Christ, right?

So let's get a little more clarity about this issue of repentance and get into our second point for this morning. That is, repentance is the evidence of an unseen faith. Repentance is the evidence, the outward evidence, you might say, of an unseen faith. There's a sentiment today that says, hey, man, don't judge my heart; I'm right with God. Don't judge based on what you see in my life. That's judgmental, and you have no business telling me about what my private relationship with God is. I'm on good terms with God, and you can't tell me anything to the contrary. That's not the Bible speaking. That's not the Bible speaking. To understand that, see it clearly, we need to look at the theology of repentance.

Let's look at some terms, first. The Old Testament uses two terms to describe repentance: *naham* and *shub*. *Shub*. The first word, I just like saying those Old Testament words, don't you? *Naham*, because you get to do that throat-clearing thing. But *naham*, it refers to an internal sorrow over sin, and that sorrow internally leads to a change of mind, a change of will, and then a change in life direction. The second word, *shub*, it really does refer to a turning. It could refer to somebody literally walking one way and turning and going in a different direction,

that's, that's *shub*. But when it's talking about this issue of repentance, it's looking at it from the external perspective, focusing on the actions and the behavior that reveal an internal change of mind. In particular, the word *shub*, it describes turning from something, like sin, and turning to something, like righteousness. Turning from disobedience and to obedience. Either one of those words can refer to repentance. The only difference in regard to the perspective, either on the internal sorrow with *naham*, or the external action with *shub*. But both terms are repentance terms.

In the New Testament, there are also a couple of terms: *metamelomai* and *metanoëó*. The first word, *metamelomai*, that refers to feelings. It's kind of like *naham*, it refers to feelings of remorse or regret over sin. But keep in mind, those feelings of remorse, they may or may not lead to genuine repentance. Both Judas and Peter felt *metamelomai* over their sin against Jesus. Judas had betrayed him; Peter had denied him. Very significant sins. But their feelings of remorse had different outcomes. Judas felt *metamelomai*, and he went out and hung himself. Peter felt *metamelomai*, and he returned to Christ.

Both felt remorse; only one of them actually repented. The second word, *metanoéo*, that is the unambiguous New Testament word for repentance. *Metanoéo*, it refers fundamentally to an internal change of mind and will, which is going to correspond to that Old Testament *naham*, but it results in an external change of direction, which corresponds to the Old Testament word *shub*. So you might think of *metanoéo* as sort of like those two Old Testament words wrapped into one. It encompasses the internal aspect of *naham* and the external aspect of *shub*.

So those are the words, New Testament, Old Testament. Now let's get in depth and focus on *metanoéo*, and what is it, really. Because this word really encompasses the whole concept of repentance. Repentance, the internal change of mind, demonstrated in external change of direction, going from and going to, this is the evidence of genuine Christian faith. And just like faith, with repentance there are three elements. In biblical faith, three elements, and biblical repentance. There's an intellectual element, there's an emotional element, and there's a volitional element. Intellectual, emotional, volitional.

The intellectual element means you have understood the truth. It's what many people mean when they say, yeah, I believe in Christianity. I believe in God; I believe in Christ. It's that "the demons believe, but they shudder." It's that kind of belief. They intellectually comprehend and understand the words you're using. But this is a very important issue in reconciling relationships because you have already in your reconciling, you've already in due diligent to that act, you have confessed your sin biblically using biblical terms. Remember that you've examined yourself in the light of the truth of Scripture to determine whether or not that feeling of shame is an accurate indication of the guilt of sin. You identified the sin as sin using biblical terms. So you understand it. You get it. You comprehend it. That's the intellectual component.

There's an emotional component as well, and this means that this emotional component grips you on an emotional level, sometimes even visceral feeling of shame and sorrow. Negatively, you sorrow over your sin, but positively, you long for righteousness in your life. You're zealous to make things right. You long to confess your sin to God and be right. You, you want to confess and reconcile with anyone you've offended, and you

are zealous to change, eager to grow, to mature. Another way to describe this element of emotion in repentance is to say you're definitely not indifferent about the issue. You're not unaffected about your sin. You're not dispassionate. Rather, you find yourself hating your sin, despising it. You're ashamed by it, you're remorseful, and your heart burns and yearns with a deep desire to put distance between yourself and your sin; pursue righteousness instead.

That's the intellectual, the emotional. Now comes the most difficult part for many of us. It's the volitional element, right? It's where our will has to get engaged. This is what's difficult for us. The volitional element of repentance involves the sustained engagement of the will as we purpose to change and bring our behavior into conformity with God's Word and without the engagement of the will, listen, there is no biblical repentance. If your will is not engaged, if you are not volitionally changing, there's no repentance. You say, well, this is hard. Yeah, let me add a word: It's actually impossible. And that's why, just like faith, repentance is a gift of God. It's not a human work. It's not your works. It's God's works. It's God's energy, it's his Word, it's his Spirit, it's his

action energizing you, working within you. Do you cooperate in that action? Absolutely, you do. But it's him working in you to both understand, to feel it, and then to make the change.

Look, you can be as remorseful as Judas and never repent, and be trapped in a sin that leads to death. I see that over and over. It's tragic. You can be like Esau, a profane man, Hebrews 12:16, who rejected his birthright and he exchanged it for a bowl of stew. Hebrews 12:17 tells us, "Afterward, when Esau desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected because he found no chance to repent though he sought it with tears." What a tragic case! But notice, after Esau recognized the depths of his sin, that is the intellectual element, he mourned for it with tears. It's the emotional element. But Hebrews tells us he never repented. Why? Because his remorse stopped short of affecting his will. It never produced repentance. Understanding is essential, but it's not enough. Emotions and tears are evidence of remorse, but they're not evidence, necessarily, of a godly sorrow leading to repentance if they're not accompanied by a change of will demonstrated in a change of behavior.

Again, we're not talking about perfection. We're talking about direction, particularly when it comes to those stubborn, deep-seated sins that the Puritans rightly called besetting sins. You know, those things that were stamped on you when you were young, and they just continue to visit you over the course of your life, and you feel like, when am I ever going to get rid of this? Those are besetting sins. Not talking. We're talking, here, about direction. We're talking about trajectory. It's apparent over time as your sin decreases in frequency and intensity. When there's an increasing frequency and consistency in obedience to the truth, walking righteously, that's repentance.

We've got our first and second points under the belt. Now we need to understand how repentance is really, you know, the essence of the Christian life. It's the evidence of genuine, saving Christian faith. That's the summary, the theology we've talked about. Let's look at our third point and consider just kind of a practical example of repentance. What does repentance actually look like? Point number three: Repentance is the outworking of godly sorrow. Godly sorrow, and when I say that, that repentance is the outworking of godly sorrow, you

understand that the intellectual element has been solved. They've recognized the issue. Godly sorrow means that the emotional element is there as well. So we're going to kind of hone in in this example on the volitional element and see what happened in this situation.

Turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 7. 2 Corinthians 7. This is one of the key passages to show us what true repentance actually looks like. You should definitely get at least 2 Corinthians 7:11. Jot that down and make that a memory verse for yourself, okay? 2 Corinthians 7:11. But the bulk of the chapter, 2 Corinthians 7:2-16, it's a beautiful, beautiful passage. It illustrates reconciliation between the Apostle Paul and then this remorseful and repentant Corinthian church. It just portrays an excellent example of a reconciled relationship, here. In 2 Corinthians 7:8, Paul refers to a letter that he had written to the Corinthians, one that made them grieve. That's a reference to 1 Corinthians, which if you've read that letter, you know it's a letter of rebuke to a church that was producing the rotten fruit of a deep-seated pride. So Paul had to rebuke the Corinthians, and he wrote that first letter. But then, when some false apostles infiltrated the

Corinthian church, they influenced the leaders of the church to spurn that letter. So Paul paid them a personal visit. He administered a little apostolic discipline, which he mentions in 2 Corinthians 2:1-3. And for Paul, although it pained him to write a letter of rebuke, it, it pained him to visit for the sake of punishment, he did it gladly, gladly because he loved them.

Listen, that is the bold, confrontational side of Christian love, and sometimes leaders need to exercise that kind of love. Sometimes Christians need to exercise that kind of love with one another. When that kind of love is lacking, I'd make the case that there is no love at all because God demonstrated this kind of love toward us when he confronted us of our sin and rebuked us and turned us to Christ. You're never going to know why Jesus is the solution until you understand why you are the problem and your sin is the problem, right?

So although it pained him, he loved them. Look at verse 8 and notice his attitude. "Even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it, for I see

that that letter grieved you, though only for a little while, and as it is I rejoice not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief so that you suffered no loss through us." He's rejoicing, here, because the Corinthians ultimately repented in this matter. There was a systemic sin in the Corinthian church which threatened to tear this church apart and absolutely destroy it. It's apparent in the first letter. The second letter reveals the influence of false teachers, who were turning this entire church against the apostolic foundation laid by Paul. But there was a godly element within the church, and by God's grace, they came to their senses. They took courage. They rose up. They dealt with the sinful people and the sin in their midst. And they followed Paul's counsel, they sought fellowship with him. This is such a beautiful picture of the process of restorative church discipline at work. A church that was threatened with extinction is now restored into health and life. Even though this incident was painful, not just for the Corinthians, but most especially for this soft-hearted Apostle. Listen, even in a difficult situation like this, you know who's most hurt? It's the godly person because the ungodly person doesn't feel a thing. Their hearts are calloused. They have no affection. They have no

feeling toward those whom they're sinning against. It's the one who's soft-hearted, he's sorrowing.

He says, "It's necessary," verse 10, "for godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death." You want to illustrate that verse in your mind? Think Judas and Peter. Judas and Peter. Their repentance honored God, these Corinthians, because they learned to fear God rather than man, and God granted them restoration. But notice, notice how Paul could tell that this church was truly repentant. We've already been reading it, hearing the evidence in what we've read; but here is the clearest proof in verse 11, "For seeing what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves," what, "what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment at every point you proved yourself innocent in the matter." True repentance started when they mourned over their sin, verses 7-8. It began with an intellectual and an emotional component. They understood, and they reacted to that understanding with godly sorrow. But that sorrow led, it didn't stop there, it led to turning from sin and turning to righteousness. And in verse 11, you can see six

evidences of repentance. You might want to jot these down as little outline points for yourself. Six evidences of repentance. This helps us see what true repentance looks like.

First, the Corinthians sought to clear themselves of the charge. "What eagerness to clear yourselves," he said. They didn't do so with mere words. They did it with an undeniable action. They confessed their sins, sought to make it right by doing what was right. True repentance is a process of correction of righting the wrong. Secondly, Paul saw what indignation? The truth stirred up within them, a holy anger, a sense of righteous indignation. They were indignant about the sin in their midst, their own sin, the sin of the offenders, over the shame, the reproach this ordeal brought upon the church. True repentance inflames righteous passions. Third, Paul noted what fear? They feared God's displeasure over their sin, specifically by heeding Paul's corrective. True repentance establishes an attitude of God-centered fear, more concerned about pleasing God, not about pleasing man. Fourthly, Paul said, "what longing?" What longing? What longing? They longed to be reconciled to Paul, verse 7. The word longing means they recognized their need; their need of his ministry, their need of his, his fellowship. They didn't want to

do without Paul. They didn't want to see his ministry go away, his association. So they dealt with their sin out of a longing for a right relationship with him. Again, true repentance seeks to reconcile relationships; does whatever it takes. Number five: Paul noted the Corinthians' zeal. Zeal, that's a word that's marked with a strong sense of dedication or righteousness, that commitment so strong that the word zeal is often translated jealousy. Jealous. True repentance is a deep commitment. It's fueled by a jealous zeal. That is to say, there is no satisfying, dissuading, turning zeal aside. It will get what it's after. Zeal. Number six: Paul heard the report of the punishment they'd inflicted on the offender. They demonstrated their repentance by correcting that former indifference to sin, that, that sense of giving sin a pass. We like to say around here, we say, oh, we want to cover that over with grace. No, that's not covering it over with grace; that's just fear of confrontation. Let's stop using that! Grace actually deals with sin. Grace is not indifferent to sin. They finally got it. They dealt with it. They didn't want to see sin repeated, and so what did they do? They inflicted punishment. Why? For the sake of loving the offender, for the sake of the health of the church. True repentance takes measures to prevent sin from happening, which again could mean that punishment is appropriate.

God-given sorrow had produced an earnestness in them, which caused them to do whatever it would take to, to deal with sin, to clear themselves of the charges. And Paul sums it up in verse 11, saying, "At every point, you proved yourselves innocent in the matter." Not sinless, mind you, innocent. They took the appropriate action to put things right. That's innocence. They turned from reluctance to deal with sin; they turned it into a condition of innocence by dealing with that sin. They dealt with it appropriately and righteously.

Now hopefully you notice the theological elements of repentance that showed up in that passage. We saw *naham*, and we saw *shub*; we saw *metamelomai* and we saw *metanoéo*, both the internal and external elements, the turning from sin, the turning to righteousness. We saw the intellectual and the emotional at work. We saw the volitional elements there as well. Genuine repentance, all of it portrayed in a single verse, 2 Corinthians 7:11. Excellent verse for you to memorize, and as you strive to work out repentance in your own life and in your relationships, think about that verse. Test your repentance against that pattern and see how it measures up. If it's not

there, and listen, beloved, it often isn't. Why? Because we are sometimes so heard-hearted, sometimes so dull of understanding. Sometimes we can understand the terms, the words, but it's just not gripping us emotionally. We just don't get the sorrow that we should have. And even when we do sorrow over it, then, then we fail and falter in our putting repentance into effect in manifest change in our lives and our wills.

Beloved, I, I'm there with you. It is hard, and I said it before, I'll say it again: Apart from the grace of God, it is impossible to do this. This is a grace of God working in and through your life. So if you find yourself falling short of repentance, join the club. But don't stay there. Get on your knees and pray. Get on your knees and pray because God will grant the grace. Why? He wants to see us work this out. This is what he saved us to; is to live this way.

That's how we carry through in this matter of reconciling relationships, and as I said at the beginning, repentance is the crowning jewel of reconciliation because it not only deals with sin, past sin, by forsaking it. It also strives to prevent

future sin by growing in righteousness. Repentance is the essence of the Christian life. It's the evidence of an unseen faith. It's the outworking of a godly sorrow. And look, if we'll commit ourselves as individuals and as a corporate body, especially as we recognize we're coming here to the Lord's Table this morning, if we commit ourselves to be repentant Christians, our relationships are going to grow close, aren't they? They're going to grow intimate. They're going to grow rock solid because we're going to see each other at our best and our worst, aren't we? That's where things really take shape. In humility before God, in an attitude of meekness toward one another, we're going to learn to re-establish trust with each other, to build credibility as we honor one another by carrying out biblical reconciliation to its very end. It's not just a matter of not sinning. That's just the start. It's also a matter of righteous living, righteous living which is going to promote unity, harmony, and maturity in our church. Let's pray.

Father, we have heard your Word and we understand. We also recognize, though, that it goes beyond our need to intellectually grasp and comprehend, but it really needs to take, take shape and take a grip in our heart. And for that we

come before you this morning, admitting that we are often dull and hard-hearted, and we need you to penetrate through that callousness that's built up. And we ask you to soften our hearts, to help us to grasp the need for working out repentance before you, that we might please you, that we might love others. Help us to be grasped in a sense of remorse, a sense of sorrow over sin, a sense of zeal and longing for righteousness. And then help us, Father, to have wisdom in putting together strategies and tactics for how we might, according to a will bent on pleasing you, that we might pursue repentance in practical ways. It's not just about stopping sinning, Father. We all long to do that. But it's also about living righteously, we'd not only put off, but we would put on, that we would walk in the Spirit and there would be no room for walking in the flesh. So please occupy us with good and godly things, and help us where we fail because we fail so often. And as we remember our failure, we also remember the Lord's Table before us, and what you did to forgive the transgressions and our many failures before you. You put your Son Jesus Christ to death on the cross to forgive all of our sins and to cover us in perfect righteousness. So we rejoice to come before you this morning, to partake of this table, the bread and the cup, and we just ask



that you would bless this time to this fellowship, and bless it to the joy of our hearts. In Jesus' name, amen.