

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Marks of False Repentance

Selected Passages

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SermonAudio Blurb: Repentance is missing in too many men and women claiming Christ as Lord. Rather than rejecting and turning away from sin to the living God, it is more easy to merely straddle the two worlds and lay claim to both. Repentance is a mark of a true Christian. Not merely a time in the past that one repented, but a life marked by repentance. In this sermon the idea of false repentance is examined. It is hoped it will give believers eyes to better see both their lives and others as we all press forward in perseverance.

Dismiss

I. Introduction.

- A. Last week we examined five marks of true repentance.
 - 1. Clarify my remarks on regret and repentance.
 - 2. There is a regret when sin is found in your life that is bad. It is a regret of being found out, being caught, but not a regret over the actual sin itself and what it represents before God.
 - a. This regret can show itself with much groanings and tears. You can hear a torrent of words that describe the person's shame and requests to be forgiven.
 - b. But this sorrow, or regret, is what Paul calls a "sorrow of this world" and it ends in death.
 - 3. But there is a level of sorrow and regret that is such that it moves us to repentance. This is good and right.
 - a. But understand regret by itself means little.
 - b. You need to look for what that regret moves the person to do or not do.
- B. This whole issue is because of a recent apostasy that took place and the many questions that arose out of it. It is my hope that we can place ourselves under the authority of God's word and become a bit more wiser and a bit more sober-minded about what it means to follow Christ.

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- C. A Christian is simply a person who lives a life of repenting.
1. You begin by repenting, turning from your sin and all those things you treasure as your highest good and turn to Jesus Christ for forgiveness.
 2. But it does not end there. So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Rom. 8:12-13)
 3. One man said that every Christian is called a repenter, but he must be a repenting repenter.
 4. In fact the bible assumes that a Christian is a repenter when the Lord gave us instructions on church discipline. One sins, is confronted and repents. But for the one who will not repent the ultimate end is to be put out of the Church and be viewed as an unbeliever.
 5. In other words, an consistently unrepentant Christian is not something that God recognizes.
- D. What is repentance?
1. Repentance is a change of mind regarding sin and God, an inward turning from sin to God through Jesus Christ, which is known by its fruit—obedience.
 2. It is hating what you once loved and loving what you once hated.
 3. For the one repenting, faith is his only choice. He knows he has nothing in himself to offer to God. He knows that within himself there is no strength. So he must turn from his efforts and cry out to the One alone who can save.
- E. But there are many ways for us to pretend to repent. To fool even ourselves into thinking that we are truly following Christ.
1. One of the best things for us to have is a robust understanding of true vs false repentance as a church.
 2. If one or two understand the differences then we will have trouble in our midst. The reason is simple, too many are ignorant of the key differences and therefore they build up and inadvertently themselves and others when serious questions should instead be happening.
 3. But when the church as a whole takes this serious then we, in love and concern, look out for the well-being of our soul and those around us.

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4. Or, as I mentioned last week, we practice what the writer of Hebrews said, “Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today,’ lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” (Heb. 3:12-13)
- F. The religious man often deceives himself in his repentance.
1. The true believer is quite capable of the darkest of sins. But there is a constant battle and a lack of love for those sins.
 2. The religious person secretly still loves their sin. They have not been truly converted. For them, they would sin more if society allowed them to.
 3. This is what is happening before our eyes.
 - a. Now the church is having to discuss if one can be a homosexual and a Christian. Can you be transgender and a Christian. Can you be pro-abortion and a Christian. Can you love pornography and be a Christian.
 - b. Our society continues to jettison any moral sanity and as it does the Church too often fails to stand fast on what a Christian is despite what the culture declares to be right and good.
 - c. And the reason this happens is that there are many within the Church who really are not truly of it. So their love of sin becomes more apparent as the restrictions of society are released.
- G. Today I want to consider various ways a person can claim repentance but never actually repent. What are the marks of false repentance?
1. Before I take you through these points I warn you that the difference between true and false repentance is subtle and not real obvious.
 2. Care needs to be taken before you decide that a person is repentant or not. If they seek your forgiveness and you have no evidence that would cause you to question their sincerity, you give it.
 3. This is exactly why apostasy is so dangerous. A person can sit in a church for years, serving, teaching and even leading and give you no sense that beneath the surface there lies an unbelieving heart.
 4. I have found that it is only after the fact that you look backward and see things that now make better sense to you.

II. The Marks of False Repentance.

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- A. External change rather than heart change.
1. For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. (Psalm 51:16-17)
 - a. David was guilty of heinous sins but he belonged to the Lord.
 - b. 2 Samuel 12:1ff.
 - (1) Note it was YHWH who sent Nathan.
 - (2) Note in vs 7 that it was YHWH who actually confronted David.
 - (3) In vss 9-12 his punishment is described. **Remember that all of this is from the hand of God who is kind, patient, forgiving, and gracious.**
 - (4) Notice David's response in vs 13. No negotiations, no defense, and no denial. He embraced it.
 2. "And rend your heart and not your garments." Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness And relenting of evil. (Joel 2:13)
 - a. Here we have a prophet sent by God to warn the people of Judah.
 - b. They still had the form of religion but their hearts were wholly of this age.
 - c. The apostate begins by doing the necessary external changes that he sees are proper but there was never an internal work by the Holy Spirit to give him new life.
 3. This is something that is hard to discern for us. But it was something obvious to our Lord.
 - a. Mark 7:1-23.
 - b. We too often forget that from the heart flows out what is in the heart. We make excuses and overlook what is normative. In fear we hope against hope because of what we might find out if we looked more carefully.

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- c. Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh. (James 3:11-12)
- B. Confusing experience for actual repentance.
1. Here we come to the evil of how the evangelical church approaches conversion and salvation.
 - a. A book written that I haven't read describes it all. *Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart.*
 - b. Parents do this inadvertently with their children. They are so intent on getting them "saved" that they press them to profess what is not true in their hearts. I have seen mothers or fathers who are terrified because their kids have not prayed to accept Jesus at the age of 8 or 9.
 - c. Yet often we see those same young people come to genuine faith and repentance years later after struggling to truly live for Christ without any genuine heart change.
 - d. At the same time we witness countless who walk away from the faith once the fetters of living in a Christian home are released. They are free to finally drink deeply of this age to which they belong.
 2. James 1:22-27 is in view here.
 - a. The controlling theme of James is that of true faith. As a result it is a hard book to read comfortably because he is stripping away all of the warm blankets we cuddle up with to protect ourselves from examining what we truly believe.
 - b. One can have great emotion and have a moving religious experience and cling to those moments. But they do not mean that anything has happened.
 - c. Israel experienced the experience and emotion of being brought out of slavery in Egypt. And frankly their experiences are far beyond what any of us have experienced.
 - d. But their hearts were not changed and when they came to the very edge of the land promised to them what did they do? They forgot

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- the Word of God. They turned away in unbelief and died in their sins.
- e. James says that the mark of true faith is the hear and do what the Word says.
 - f. One of the most commonly misunderstood verses is 1:19-20.
3. Do not confuse great sorrow with true repentance. It is common for emotion to be present with repentance, but the evidence will be what lasting fruit comes from it.
- C. You confuse speaking the right words of repentance with actual repenting.
- 1. There is a parable that describes this well in Matthew 21:28-32.
 - 2. This is also in view when John writes clear words of instruction and warning in 1 John 2:4 or 4:20.
 - 3. Do not confuse saying the right thing with a heart that has turned from sin to God.
 - a. It is a good thing to honestly confess your wrong doing. But beware of confessing it so as to appear religious and holy but never actually repenting.
 - b. This is my point from last week with those who ask the same request year after year. Pray for my attitude with work, I am really struggling to have a good attitude. Pray for desire to share Christ, I really struggle with evangelism. Etc, etc, etc.
 - 4. Along the same vein. There is the difference of where you talk against sin in public like a true repentor but never repent in private.
 - a. Matthew 23:1-3 is a fascinating verse in what it says.
 - b. This again is the danger of keeping your conversations safe while having coffee or meeting together in CG.
 - c. I know the feeling when you ask a person how their marriage is and there is a hint that comes out that there are real problems. Your heart beats fast and you too quickly push it aside by a vague, "I am sorry, I will pray for you." And in doing so you do not help a brother or sister repent.

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- D. Confusing stopping something out of fear of being caught rather than because it is sin.
1. It is interesting to watch our nation in its horrid decline morally. For years actions were considered immoral but without the reality of the gospel and grace informing these positions. Homosexual or transgenderism or pornography and sexual activity outside of marriage were all understood to be bad. When I was a boy divorce was whispered about.
 2. But as this nation moved toward a more atheistic position that was in keeping with the secret desires of the populace and the leaders these became more mainstream.
 3. As the social stigma wears away these are now badges of honor. They signify our freedom against outdated morals. Even as they merely add new chains to the ones that already lock down our souls.
 4. And all of this enters the church as well.
 - a. Repentance only because you fear the consequences is no true repentance.
 - b. The reason is what I just described as a nation. As consequences are removed the stigma is reduced and the desire is greater than the fear.
 - c. This is, in part, what Paul means in 1 Timothy 1:8-11. But it only works as long as it can actually bring about consequences. It is true that in many Muslim societies theft is small compared to the U.S. But that is because they literally will cut your hand off. But that is only fear, not out of a love of Christ and therefore a love of one's neighbor.
- E. You repent for the purpose of gains rather than because it is right to do.
1. You witness this at times in the public sins of celebrity pastors. Their huge ministry that is centered around them is crumbling due to sin. First they retreat, then they bring in a celebrity counselor to speak into their life. Finally they come with tears to admit their sin and how they are formed a group of trustworthy men who will help in resolving this sin.
 2. But as time goes on it becomes obvious that they are only seeking to keep the massive machine going for their own purposes.

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3. But hear the words of Jesus, Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds.” (Matt. 16:24-27)
 4. True repentance owns the cost and does not count it as a true loss.
 5. We forget that the gospel is shameful to this age. True repentance is often seen to those of this age as foolish. But true repentance desires to be right with God more precious than the opinions or riches of this age.
- F. You speak and model repentance on minor issues to deflect attention to the more serious issues.
1. "But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. (Luke 11:42)
 2. "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. (Matthew 6:24) is something I fear will be the downfall of many who profess Christ in this country.
 - a. The double-minded man is an apostate waiting to be found out.
 - b. For a while you can seem to love your God and your possessions and safety and comfort. But in the end you will hate God to your doom.
- G. You leave room for the sin to be reintroduced in your life after repenting.
1. To repent is to turn from sin to the living God. It is not tucking that beloved sin in your back pocket out of sight until things get to hard for you and you pull it back out.
 2. I recognize that some things you cannot deliver yourself out of. You lust for power and riches but the answer is not to quit your job and go on welfare.

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3. But to be honest, how many sins are merely tucked to the side within easy reach when we desire them?
4. It is to this point that Paul writes in Romans 13:8-14.

III. Conclusion.

- A. I believe I could go on but the point is made. Apostasy is often something that happens and shocks all who watch it.
 1. But once it happens those who are able to inquire and observe and remember will usually see some of the points I made above.
 2. Remember that the apostate is one who professed to have what he never actually had—Jesus Christ.
- B. Repentance is inextricably bound together with true faith.
 1. What you truly believe will define how and of what you repent.
 2. True faith joins you to your Lord and Savior. From that moment on the Triune God works in you to bring about His perfect will.
 3. Listen to these two benedictions.
 - a. “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)
 - b. “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen,” (Jude 1:24-25)
 4. A true repentor is one who is consistently aware that apart from the gracious work of God in his life he will fall away. It is an awareness that causes him to reject self-sufficiency.
- C. So to each of you I remind you that salvation is found only in Jesus Christ. It is what He has done on our behalf to pay for our sin and to destroy the power of death that brings us hope.

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1. We are called to remain in His love.
 2. We are called to daily put to death the sinful desires that constantly seek to gain ground.
 3. We are called, therefore, to call each other to holiness and humility.
 4. We are to encourage each other while we remain to hold fast to the confession of faith which we made earlier.
- D. May we do so.

Community Group Questions

- Discuss as a group how well you are functioning as men and women who truly seek to encourage each other in their faith.
- Why are these points so hard to discern in one's life?
- Discuss what Paul means in 2 Corinthians 13:5-6. How are each of you doing this?