

The Book of 1Samuel—15:24-31

“True Repentance”

(10/11/15)

For the last couple of weeks, in our study in 1Samuel, we have been looking at chapter 15—a two part message entitled *“Selective Obedience.”*

We can’t leave this chapter without extracting one more very important lesson from it which I’ve entitled *“True Repentance.”* (Give background)

1 Samuel 15:13-23 (NKJV)

¹³ Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed *are* you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD." ¹⁴ But Samuel said, "What then *is* this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" ¹⁵ And Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed." ¹⁶ Then Samuel said to Saul, "Be quiet! And I will tell you what the LORD said to me last night." And he said to him, "Speak on." ¹⁷ So Samuel said, "When you *were* little in your own eyes, *were* you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel?" ¹⁸ Now the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' ¹⁹ Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD?" ²⁰ And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. ²¹ But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal." ²² So Samuel said: "Has the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *And* to heed than the fat of rams. ²³ For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from *being* king."

Now what God wanted from Saul in the face of his disobedience was repentance—what He got was excuses, justifications and passing the blame onto others.

What exactly is repentance and why is it so important in our relationship with God.

First of all let me give you the definition of repentance.

I. The Definition of Repentance

The word *repentance* in both the Old and New Testaments basically means to change one's behavior—the Greek word *metanoia* literally means “*to have a change of mind*”—a change of mind that leads to a change of direction.

II. The Importance of Repentance

It's important to note that the concept of repentance permeates the Scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments—let's just look at some of the N.T. examples.

A. ‘Repent’ was the first word out of the mouth of John the Baptist (Matt.3:1-2)

B. ‘Repent’ was the first word out of the mouth of Jesus (Matt.4:17)

C. ‘Repent’ was the first word out of the Apostle's mouths (Mark 6:7,12)

D. Repentance was an integral part of the Gospel that the Church was commissioned to preach to the world (Luke 24:46-47)

E. ‘Repent’ was the first word of Peter's invitation on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38)

F. Repentance was an essential part of Paul's gospel presentation (Acts 26:19-20)

Repentance is a word we don't hear too much anymore today in the church—it sounds archaic and out of step with the culture.

And so in an effort to be hip, cool, relevant and politically correct many pastors have removed it from their preaching and teaching altogether.

They have a problem with the “R” word—kind of like a little boy named Jimmy:

Jimmy had trouble pronouncing the letter “R” so his teacher gave him a sentence to practice at home: “Robert gave Richard a rap in the rib for roasting the rabbit so rare.” Some days later the teacher asked him to say the sentence for her. Jimmy rattled it off like this: “Bob gave Dick a poke in the side for not cooking the bunny enough”—He had evaded the “R” words. There are a lot of Christians today who go to great lengths to avoid the “R” word of “Repentance.”

One well known pastor had this to say on the subject—

“Recently I listened to a talk show on a local religious radio station. This daily program features a man who bills himself as a Christian psychologist. On the day I listened he was talking about the importance of overcoming our sense of guilt. Self-blame, he told his audience, is usually irrational and therefore potentially very harmful. He gave a long lecture about the importance of forgiving oneself. The whole discourse was an echo of the world’s wisdom: Guilt is a virtual mental defect. Don’t let it ruin your self-image. And so on. He never mentioned repentance or restitution as prerequisites for self-forgiveness, and he never cited a single passage of Scripture.

That kind of counsel is as deadly as it is unbiblical. Guilt feelings may not always be rational, but they are nearly always a reliable signal that something is wrong somewhere, and we had better come to grips with whatever it is and make it right. Guilt functions in the spiritual realm like pain in the material realm. Pain tells us there is a physical problem that must be dealt with or the body will suffer harm. Guilt is a spiritual pain in the soul that tells us something is evil and needs to be confronted and cleansed.”

(Define legitimate and illegitimate guilt)

The only way legitimate guilt can be effectively dealt with and removed is through repentance.

III. The Misconception of Repentance

While it is true that repentance will be accompanied by regret and remorse—they alone don't constitute repentance.

The main misconception that many harbor under concerning repentance is that they equate it only with *remorse* and *regret* and not ultimately with change.

Remorse and regret are rooted in feelings whereas true repentance is rooted in action (turning around and making a change).

Paul the apostle addressed this very issue in 2Corinthians 7 calling remorse or regret “*worldly sorrow*” if no change takes place—

2 Corinthians 7:9-10 (NKJV)

⁹ Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner...¹⁰ For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Paul is saying that feelings of remorse or regret over your sins make you feel bad for what you have done—but in and of themselves don't lead a person to make any changes or provide restitution.

Paul said this kind of ‘sorrow’ is worldly and therefore cannot bring a person into salvation—it only leads to death (spiritual death or separation from God).

And if the person is already saved it won't restore their broken fellowship with God until there is true repentance and not just feelings of regret.

In his commentary on Matthew, John A. Broadus observes that, “*wherever this Greek word (metanoia) is used in the New Testament the reference is to changing the mind and the purpose from sin to holiness.*”

Matthew 3:8 (NKJV)

⁸ Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance,

Acts 26:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in, *The Cost of Discipleship* said,

“Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our church. Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjack’s wares. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance (change)...”

We can go back to 1937, Dr. Harry A. Ironside, a great man of God and Bible teacher noted that the biblical doctrine of repentance was being systematically diluted and deleted from the gospel message by some who saw it as a work and therefore contrary to the gospel of grace Paul preached.

Let me quote from the book he wrote entitled, *Except Ye Repent*. Ironside was a champion of repentance—he wrote this,

“The doctrine of repentance is the missing note in many otherwise orthodox and fundamentally sound circles today. Shallow preaching that does not grapple with the terrible fact of man’s sinfulness and guilt, calling on all men everywhere to repent results in shallow conversions. And so we have myriads of glib-tongued professors today who give no evidence of regeneration whatsoever. Prating of salvation by grace, they manifest no grace in their lives. Loudly declaring they are justified by faith alone, they fail to remember that faith without works is dead...”

Charles Spurgeon said,

“We are certain that a man is saved by faith alone; but we are just as certain that the kind of faith that saves a man is never really alone.”

Titus 1:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him...

So true biblical repentance always involves change right away or leads to change.

It is true that sometimes change takes time but true repentance desires it with all the heart and keeps seeking God for grace and strength to change—it isn't just lip service.

Theologian Erich Sauer, in *The Triumph of the Crucified*, speaks of true repentance as “*a threefold action*”—

- *First* of all involves awareness and understanding of our sin or wrongdoing.
- *Second*, it involves our emotions, we feel bad about what we have done.
- *Third*, it involves the appropriate actions that make for a change of lifestyle.

Recognition of personal wrong doing is an important first step—but by itself it is useless, even dangerous, because it tends to make a person think that mere recognition along with a little remorse is all that's necessary—as if that's all that God is looking for.

IV. Our Resistance to Repentance

This is an extremely important lesson and one we must learn.

It's a lesson Satan has tried to keep many Christians from learning as he tries to lead them down the path of remorse with regard to their sin while blinding them to the true nature of repentance.

1 Samuel 15:24-31 (NKJV)

²⁴ Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. ²⁵ Now therefore, please pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD."

²⁶ But Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel." ²⁷ And as Samuel turned around to go away, *Saul* seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. ²⁸ So Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, *who is* better than you. ²⁹ And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He *is* not a man, that He should relent." ³⁰ Then he said, "I have sinned; *yet* honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD your God." ³¹ So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD.

The plain, simple truth of the matter is that we would rather do anything than repent—even to the point of engaging in legitimate spiritual activities like worship, Bible reading, fellowship or prayer.

You see it's easier and more desirable to our fallen nature to offer God spiritual activities rather than repentance because we detest admitting that our heart is selfish, proud, and rebellious and that we need to make some changes.

And therefore we would rather do anything short of coming face to face with our sinful attitudes and disobedient actions.

Here in I Samuel 15 we see a classic example of this very thing—notice very carefully what has happened.

Saul has disobeyed God in a rather serious way—and while he admits he has done something wrong he stops short of true repentance.

How do I know? Because true repentance doesn't have "self" attached to it—"I have sinned, yet honor me now..."v.30

That's impossible because until there is heart-felt contrition, confession and repentance sin has not been dealt with;

And until sin is properly dealt with not only will God not honor or bless us—He won't even fellowship with us or answer our prayers.

Isaiah 59:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. ² But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden *His* face from you, So that He will not hear.

Where there is true repentance there are no strings or conditions attached to it.

"I have sinned; yet honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel..."v.30

True repentance isn't concerned with what people think—it only cares about the heart of God and making things right with Him.

Notice that Saul even goes as far as wanting to worship the Lord rather than repent—"... **and return with me, that I may worship the LORD your God.**"v.30

Saul is a classic example of someone who was demonstrating remorse and not repentance when confronted with his sin.

His sorrow is totally self-focused, he regrets what he has done but his regrets are centered on what the consequences of his actions have brought into his life rather than it has grieved the heart of God.

That's the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow—godly sorrow is God focused and worldly sorrow is self focused.

Look at the results that godly sorrow produced in the Corinthians—

2 Corinthians 7:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, *what* clearing *of yourselves*, *what* indignation, *what* fear, *what* vehement desire, *what* zeal, *what* vindication! In all *things* you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

Most people feel that simply recognizing that they have done wrong, that they have sinned and feel bad about it—that's enough.

But there is no forgiveness in the simple recognition of sin—even if great feelings of remorse and regret follow.

That really doesn't please the heart of God because that's not all He wants from us.

Saul recognized he had sinned and he felt badly about what he had done.

Remorse and regret can produce a reaction of sorrow, even tears—but not necessarily over the sin but over what the sin has brought into my life.

Again, simply feeling guilty over what I have done is not repentance.

In essence I haven't even touched upon the sin itself, and Satan has effectively counterfeited the path that leads to repentance because it is so important to our walk with God.

And it is possible for a Christian to remain in an attitude of regret and remorse for years and get nowhere in victory over sin—because God doesn't work through regret and remorse—He works through repentance.

“How can I tell if I'm the path of true repentance?”

Where there is true repentance the fruit of change will accompany it and there won't be any conditions attached to it.

The liar won't be concerned he is found out, the thief will be willing to make restitution and take whatever punishment he has coming—you see there is cost involved in repentance and that's one of the reasons we avoid it.

All too often when we come to the end of another day we pray, *“Father, forgive the sins I have committed today for Jesus' sake”*—not really coming to terms with the evil we have walked in that day.

In fact many times the guilt of our actions doesn't even come to mind—we just make a blanket statement without conviction—that is not the path of true repentance nor does it reflect the heart of God in what He wants from His children.

And even when we do recognize our sin for what it is—it is so much easier to try to exchange religious activities and even service for repentance because change is hard—harder than going to church, reading your Bible or serving as an usher or Sunday school teacher.

But for our sins to be truly forgiven, and for the power of sin to be broken and us set free from its hold—there must be true repentance (a heart rending desire for change), and that begins with acknowledging that you have done wrong and you confess it to God.

The story has been told how when King Frederick II, an eighteenth-century King of Prussia, was visiting a prison in Berlin, the inmates tried to prove to him how they had been unjustly imprisoned—all except one. That one sat quietly in a corner, while all the rest protested their innocence. Seeing him sitting there oblivious to the commotion, the king asked him what he was there for. *"Armed robbery, Your Honor."* The king asked, *"Were you guilty?"* *"Yes, Sir,"* he answered. *"I entirely deserve my punishment."* The king then gave an order to the guard: *"Release this guilty man. I don't want him corrupting all these innocent people."*

When it comes to our sins we can make all kinds of excuses for ourselves to our King.

We can justify our actions—we can even blame others as Saul did.

But until we admit our wrong, confess it to God, and desire with all our hearts to change—we will never be forgiven and set free.

You say, *"But I'm not strong enough to change. I'm not even sure I'm strong enough to will to change."*

Philippians 2:13 (NKJV)

¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

A.W. Tozer—

"God will take nine steps toward us, but he will not take the tenth. He will incline us to repent, but he cannot do our repenting for us."