

"Why Repentance Is Not Like Eating Liver and Sauerkraut and Drinking Prune Juice"
2 Corinthians 7:8-16
13 June 2021

REPENTANCE IS JUST COLLAPSING ON JESUS.

I learned that from one of my heroes, Jack Miller.

His favorite definition of repentance was, "*Collapse on Jesus. It doesn't even take energy to throw yourself on Him.*" Isn't that good? It doesn't take any energy to collapse. You just cooperate with gravity! That's all that repentance is- it's spiritually cooperating with gravity! It doesn't take any energy to collapse into the arms of Jesus. You just crumble. You just fall. And He catches you.

That's not what I heard about repentance growing up in the church! What I heard was a lot of, "*You better promise to do better. You better stop it!*"

But, repentance is more than just turning from sin; it's turning once again to Jesus. Repentance is not what most of us have heard our whole lives- *Stop that right now!*- most of us have heard that, right? Repentance is not, "*Stop that right now!*," it's, "*Come unto Me all who labor and are heavy laden.*"

Turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 7. Today we're gonna see what happened one time when the Corinthian church repented. The Greek word for repentance that Paul will use, *metanoia*, simply means to "change one's mind." That's it. Repentance is a change of mind, a change of heart. It does not *primarily* mean a change of behavior. That's important to understand. Repentance is a change of mind, a change of heart that is not *primarily* a change of behavior.

Now, that's probably not what you've heard about repentance if you grew up in the average western, evangelical church in America. But think it through. If repentance is *primarily* a change in behavior, and not a change in heart, then you know where that leads, right? Hypocrisy. Legalism. You can change your behavior, but not change your heart. You can stop doing things that you know are sin and yet still not have a change of heart.

So, repentance is a change of mind, a change of heart that is not *primarily* a change of behavior. Yes, it will lead to a change in behavior, but repentance is *primarily* a change of mind and heart. So, the change in behavior is what we would call the "fruit of repentance," but it is not the repentance itself. Don't mix those two up. The change, the transformation, the making things right that follows repentance, that is the fruit of repentance.

And when a church repents, it's a beautiful thing! It's a beautiful thing in the eyes of the Lord. The Lord loves a repentant church. And God gives us one example of that beauty in our passage today. So, we're in 2 Corinthians chapter 7 today, continuing our series *Neon Gospel: Corinthians Vol. 2*.

LOOK AT VERSE 8...

For 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 while. 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.

So, Paul sent his painful letter to the church in Corinth, where he rebuked them, and then he began to wonder if he was too harsh. At one point he regretted sending the letter, but since he heard from Titus that they responded well and repented, now Paul doesn't regret sending it. Paul rejoiced, not that they were grieved by his letter, but that they were *grieved into repentance*.

But how can repentance be a beautiful, sweet thing if it involves grief? The answer is where you are basing your repentance. As Tim Keller says, "*Fear-based repentance makes us hate ourselves. Joy-based repentance makes us hate the sin.*"

Fear-based repentance makes us hate ourselves. We're mad at ourselves for messing up again. We let God down for the thousandth time, so surely He's had it with us. That's all based on the fear that God is fickle and will one day get so upset at your terrible track record, that He'll just give up on you.

But what about grief over sin? Aren't you supposed to feel bad for your sin and sort of beat yourself up for it so that you don't do it again? *Beating-yourself-up-repentance* is not fun or joyful, right? So, how does grief over our sins play a role in what Tim Keller refers to as joy-based repentance?

It's true, as we see in our passage today, that repentance does involve grief, a godly grief over sin. But it's a temporary grief because the end result is not death, but salvation without regret. Think of it this

way: You're on a road trip and you drive 10 miles the wrong way and then you realize it, and then what happens? Grief. You experience grief that you missed your turn off. So, you turn around and get back going in the right direction. That's how grief works in repentance.

The grief that is involved in repentance occurs when you realize that you've been rejecting God and going the wrong way- *going your own way*- but that's not the destination. Grief is not the final destination. The final destination is Jesus.

So, grief for sin isn't a problem as long as it's a *godly* grief. Godly grief leads you to Jesus, not to a mirror to stare at yourself, or not to a boxing ring to beat yourself up.

All fear-based repentance puts *most* of the focus on you, and how you've failed, instead of on Jesus and what He's accomplished for us in the Gospel. Joy-based repentance puts the focus on Jesus.

Of course, at the moment of repentance, the typical reaction is to put your head down in defeat, and to start self-loathing, and to be frustrated about how you let God down, and to be frustrated with your lack of progress. And before you know it, you are repenting, but it's not Gospel-fueled, joy-based repentance. It's not a godly grief. And initially, it does feel right, right? Beating yourself up feels right. So, we begin to think, "*Surely, God needs to see that I'm upset. So, I better wallow for a bit. God forbid that I should jump to the Gospel too soon! So, I need to make sure God sees that I've learned my lesson. I better beat myself up just a little bit longer. I better stay in the corner in this time-out for a little bit longer.*"

That's not godly grief. Godly grief leads to salvation, to Jesus. And that's not what the Corinthians did. They experienced a joy-based repentance that caused them to hate sin and that eventually spread joy all through the church. Their grief over all the issues and drama and sin that were spreading in the church caused them to change their minds. They decided to deal with the man who causing trouble in the church. They felt a godly grief, a godly sorrow over what was happening in their church, which led to confession of sin...and which led to joy!

Paul says, in verse 9, "*You suffered no loss...*" So, when they repented, they didn't lose anything.

Understand this, Grace: *We win when we repent.* We don't lose. We win when we collapse on Jesus and come clean and confess sin. If we lose anything by repentance, then we lose selfishness and pride and the deeds of the flesh. But we do not lose. We gain. We gain Christ. We gain *shalom*, we gain peace.

So, don't hold onto your sin. Come out into the light. Walk in the light. Walk in the joy and freedom of repentance. *Taste the joy of repentance!* Yes, you heard me right: *Taste the joy of repentance!* That's exactly what happened at Corinth. They were grieved over the sin that was sweeping through their church family, so they changed their minds, they changed their hearts, and they said, "*We're not gonna live in the dark anymore.*" And they didn't lose out on anything when they collapsed on Jesus. They won. And so do we when we repent. If anyone loses when we repent, it's the Devil. But we win!

LOOK AT VERSE 10...

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.

Paul describes "godly grief" as leading to salvation without regret. What he means is that godly sorrow brings about repentance- a change of mind- that leads to salvation- in this case, the salvation and well-being of this church. Those who repent and collapse on Jesus and drag their darling sins out into the light have "no regrets" about repenting! They don't regret repenting and seeking restoration and reconciliation. The Corinthians had no regrets about seeking out healing in their church body, no regrets about confronting those who were causing division.

And they had no regrets because it brought healing to the church! Paul describes what their repentance produced. All of the "what's" that Paul describes in verse 11 *are* the fruit of their repentance:

- *what earnestness*- this word means "diligence, effort." The verb form of this word is used in 2 Timothy 2:15 where it says, "*Do your best/be diligent to present yourself to God as one who is approved...*" The Corinthians were diligent to deal with their issues. They got on it! They didn't drag their feet. They didn't mosey.
- *what eagerness*- They were eager to clear the air and make sure things were right with Paul.
- *what indignation*- This could mean that they were angry at this man for causing division and mad at themselves for allowing it to go so long. But also, I think they were angry at the Devil who was

- trying to destroy their church. Listen, when there's division in a church, in a family, in some relationship, don't get mad at the people. Get mad at the Devil!
- *what fear*- They wanted to see a renewal of the fear of the Lord in the church: joyful trembling and trusting awe.
 - *what longing*- They wanted to see Paul, after all, he was their founding pastor. That's the fruit of reconciliation. There's a desire to be together.
 - *what zeal*- They were passionate about reconciliation!
 - *what punishment*- They punished, through church discipline, those who were involved in causing all the drama. And that's what Paul told them in chapter 2- that they needed to restore and comfort the man who started all this drama.

Those "whats" are what you are looking for in repentance. Those "whats" are the fruit of repentance.

LOOK AT VERSE 12...

So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God.

The situation here goes back to 2 Corinthians chapter 2 where Paul mentioned the man who had offended Paul and challenged his leadership. The church had carried out church discipline on this man. Paul says in verse 12 that the reason he wrote the church was not to address the man who did the wrong, nor for his own ego or reputation, since Paul was the man who was wronged. Paul wrote the painful letter for the Corinthians' sake! Paul wasn't out to defend himself against this man who was slandering him. And he wasn't out to throw the man under the bus either. Paul wrote to them so that the church would be healthy. Again, not to clear his name, nor to get back at this man. He wrote the letter so that the church would be healthy.

The fruit of repentance is forsaking sin, and hating it. That's the negative aspect. The positive aspect of the fruit of repentance is making things right, restitution, fixing wrongs, or in the case of the Corinthians, restoring this brother who was causing so much division. And restoring their relationship with Paul. Repentance has as its heart restoration, not just clearing our name.

But, what do we typically do when there's relational conflict? 1) *We want to clear our name*. We want to justify ourselves. We feel the pressure to vindicate ourselves and make sure everybody hears our side of the story. And, 2) *We often want to attack those who attack us*. We want to get back at them and make sure they get thrown under the bus. But Paul shows us a better way. His concern is over how relational conflict will hurt the church.

Think about that: How often do we want to clear our name when something happens in our relationships? How often do we want to throw somebody under the bus? Paul shows us that our main concern should be the health of the church body.

When there are accusations and grumbings against the leadership of a church (*that's the specific context here*), it hurts the whole church, not just the leadership. When people grumble about the leadership of a church, they aren't just hurting the leadership, they are hurting and inflicting pain on the whole church! Because gossip and slander have a way of getting everywhere like glitter! If someone starts gossiping or slandering or mumbling and grumbling, all of that junk, all of that *sin* (let's call it what it is!), all of that gets everywhere in the church, just like glitter! That's the context here. But broadly speaking, any kind of division in a church hurts the entire church body, not just those directly involved.

There's a better way: Trust the Lord. Let Him vindicate. Let Him work in His church. Pray. And repent. In most situations, all the parties involved need to repent. I love what Jack Miller said once, "*If you're like me, you have some repenting to do.*" Today, no matter what is going on in each of our lives, we all have some repenting to do, don't we?

But, cheer up, y'all! Why? Because-

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If we've all got some repenting to do, don't let it get you down. Cheer up because repentance just means you collapse once again into the arms of your merciful Savior! Repentance is just admitting that you are a mess and that you desperately need Jesus. Repentance is actually a return to sanity! Repentance actually clears the fog in our minds and hearts. Repentance gives us clear minds and open hearts. The Corinthians' godly grief produced an earnestness for Paul. It helped to melt all the suspicions and cleared away the fog in their affections so that they remembered how they felt about Paul before all the drama started.

Sometimes in relationships, a wedge comes between people that makes things foggy. And we forget how

we felt about a person before all the drama started. But once there's a strain in the relationship, our hearts get foggy. We seem to forget that we once truly cared about a person. And they go from being a friend to an enemy.

Paul tells the Corinthians that their repentance actually opened up their eyes to see once again how much they loved the apostle who planted their church. And that brought joy and comfort to Paul and Co.

LOOK AT VERSE 13...

Therefore we are comforted. And besides our own comfort, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. For whatever boasts I made to him about you, I was not put to shame. But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true. And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you.

Here's what Paul is saying: A church that practices repentance restores joy to the church. The Corinthians repented and it proved what Paul told Titus about this church. They lived up to their reputation. They welcomed Titus. And all of this caused Titus to be refreshed and deepen his affection for this church. And all of this caused Paul to be comforted and encouraged and to rejoice more and more!

What started it all? Repentance! Imagine that. That means then that a church can actually repent their way to renewal, revival, refreshment. Really? Yep! Listen, revival does not come through reading church growth and marketing books. Churches grow when repentance becomes the norm, not when we adopt the practices of the business and corporate world.

Repentance is simply having a change of mind and meeting God again, on His terms. And in the Gospel, here are His terms: *"You have sin. I have grace. Let's get together."* Isn't that wonderful? That's God's kindness, which Paul says in Romans 2:4, leads us to repentance. It's His kindness that draws us to repent. Renewal starts with repentance and repentance starts with Jesus.

I think Jesus is triple-dog-daring you to repent today. He's waiting for you to get real. God is saying to you today, *"I'm ready. I'm willing. You have sin. I have grace. Let's get together. Whatdya say? Let's do this."*

I mean, who knew that repentance could be so sweet? Owning up to your sin and selfishness doesn't seem like it would be a good thing, but it is because you get Jesus! Repentance connects you once again with Jesus, your first love! So, yes, on the surface, repentance does seem like it would be eating a meal of liver and sauerkraut and drinking prune juice with a lemon for dessert. Who signs up for that meal? No thanks. But that's how many of us view repentance. But repentance is actually comforting. Holding onto your sin, loving it so much, refusing to admit you've done wrong, refusing to admit that you have made mistakes, *that* is eating liver and sauerkraut drinking prune juice and then sucking on a lemon for dessert. That's an awful place to be.

What I'm proposing today is not heroic. You don't need a Ph.D in theology to experience it. It only requires faith and honesty. Honesty about who you are, what's in your heart, your darling sins, etc. And faith in Jesus. So, that means that anybody can get in on this! Anybody can experience Gospel renewal.

God makes it so easy for us to come back to him: *Just look to Jesus. Just collapse on Jesus.* That's it! No hoops to jump through, no fine print, no footnotes, or end notes. God makes it easy for us to return. Look to Jesus and come on home and be welcomed with open arms.

Honest confession is where renewal begins. Honesty about what's in our hearts is where spiritual power begins. Paul's letter was not written to make the Corinthian church safe for sin. Paul's letter was meant to make the Corinthian church a safe place for confession and repentance! And look at the avalanche of good that flowed as a result! Joy. Comfort. Zeal. Rejoicing. Longing. Confidence. Awe.

But, please get this: *Don't seek repentance.* Seek Jesus and then repentance will follow. Start with Jesus, not repentance. Start with Jesus and then conviction and confession will follow. Joy will follow. Awe of Jesus and His wonderful love for us will follow.

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Repentance is what the prodigal son in Luke 15 does. He "came to his senses" and returned home. That's repentance.

And what awaited him at home? Being welcomed home with open arms, being kissed by his Father. And a

ring, and a royal robe, new shoes, and having the Father throw him a party! That's repentance! It's a party! It's a celebration!

So, repentance is just being hugged by God. And you have to know this about Him: God's a hugger! He hugs you when you return. He doesn't scold you.

Repentance is simply falling in love with Jesus all over again.

Maybe you've been running from God like the prodigal son. Come home. Quit running. Come to your senses and see your Savior. He loves you. He welcomes you. He's waiting to throw you a party when you return? What are you waiting for? Listen, Jesus throws the best parties! You have to know that about Him.

And He's willing to throw you a party today. So, come on home. Repent. Turn. And you'll find God hugging you and squeezing you. And you have to know that about God, too: He's a hugger.

Let Him hug you today. Just collapse into Him arms. I triple dog dare you to.