

The Road Back - (Repentance)

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All men have sinned! This is fact that is made clear in God's Word (1 Kings 8:46; Psalms 14:1-3; Romans 3:23). Sin is that which separates man from God. If one remains separated from God in this life, then he must be separated from Him Forever. Jesus Christ, God's Son, died on a cross nearly two thousand years ago in order that He might make atonement for our sins and that we, through His blood, might have forgiveness. When our sins are forgiven, we are at one with God again.

God's grace is conditioned. The death of Christ was for all men, but the forgiveness that He made possible is conditioned. Let us not be mistaken on this point! God did for us what he could not do for ourselves, but He requires that we could not do for ourselves, but He requires that we do certain things in order to receive His pardon. In the New Testament it is made plain that those who would be -cleansed by His blood- must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; Repent of their sins; Confess before men their faith in Christ; Be immersed in water, as true baptism; and go from the grave of water to -walk in newness of life- (Romans 6:1-6).

Ye must repent. It is our purpose here to look into the matter of Repentance. We like to think of it as the -road back- to God. In our pursuit of sin we have all strayed far away from God. Spiritually speaking, we are destitute-dead in our sins. Like the prodigal son of Luke 15, we are powerless to help ourselves as long as we remain in our present condition; that is, as long as we continue to sin willfully. Our only hope of salvation lies in returning to -our Father's house.- Said Jesus of the prodigal in His parable: -But when he came to himself he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants- (Luke 15:17-19, ASV).

What is repentance? Here is as perfect a picture of true repentance as it is possible to be given in words. This wayward young man first -came to

himself.- That is, he opened his eyes and took a good look at his true condition. What he saw caused him deep sorrow. So low had he fallen that he was ready to get down in the mire and eat with the hogs. He saw that death was a distinct possibility, yes, inevitable, if he did not do something soon.

Realization of sin. What a picture of the plight of every sinner. Men begin by committing sins of the so-called -respectable- variety. Their consciences may become harder and harder, until at last they lose all sense of morality. Before anyone can get out of such a condition he must first realize what the condition is.

Admission of guilt. Like the prodigal he must come to himself. He must admit that he has been a failure and that he must find a way back to God. Such an admission of guilt and dependence is always attended with a great deal of sorrow.

Sorrow for sin. Godly sorrow is the beginning of repentance. When a sinner becomes genuinely sorry for the way he has done, he will do something about it. It is not enough to be sorry that one has been caught in the act of sin. He must be sorry that he committed the sin.

Return to God. There was a time in the life of the prodigal that he was a good son of his father. He had brought much joy to his parents as they watched him grow from infancy to manhood. No doubt he had been willing errand boy in his youth. His downfall began when he decided to leave his father's house, and became entangled in the sin of the world. It was necessary, in order to make things right, to return to his starting place where he could receive help. For that reason he took the road back.

Again, this is a perfect illustration of the sinner's plight. Once we were pure, but by and by we -sinned and came short of the glory of God.- At some point in life we broke the law of God. Now the breaking of the law of the land is crime and the breaking of God's law is sin. When Adam and Eve sinned in Eden they were driven from the presence of God. When we sin, we raise a barrier between ourselves and God and we must leave the Father's house. No matter how long or short our journey down the road of sin, if we want to

return we must take the road back. That road is repentance.

In the light of Bible examples, we can see that this road is a hard one to travel. For the prodigal it was a road of remorse and swallowed pride. It took real courage for this young man to admit that he had brought shame and disgrace on himself and his family. It was a blow to his pride to realize and confess that after all he needed his father's help and counsel. He was, however, intelligent enough to realize that it was a matter of life and death, and he preferred life. Besides, he believed in his father's goodness. He believed that his father could and would help him, even though he was not worthy of being helped. Hence, his decision to leave the swine and his poverty and destitution and return to his father's house of love and plenty.

God is the father and man is the prodigal. With you, as with the son, it is life or death-eternal life, or eternal death. Why would you die in the -pig pen- of sin when the road back to God is just across the fence? At the other end of that road, longing for your return, is a Father whose goodness knows no measure. Will you not come to yourself and return to the Father's house?

Examples of repentance. You will not be the first to take this journey. Simon Peter walked this road one day. For him it was a road stained with bitter tears (Luke 22:62). Saul of Tarsas found the road back to God after a realization of his error and regrets for his wrongs. It took faith, courage, and determination for these men to repent; but they were equal to the challenge, and the example of their lives has been a blessing and inspiration to unnumbered thousands of souls.

All men need repentance. As you compare yourself with other men, you may not feel that you are so very far from God. In the Bible, however, we find that such sin as jealousy and envy are placed alongside of drunkenness and adultery as being capable of keeping us out of the kingdom of heaven (Galatians 5:19-21). The need of ALL men to repent is emphasized in the truth that, in God's sight, guilt is attached to all sins. James puts it this way: - For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all- (James 2:10, ASV). That is why Paul could tell the men of Athens, -...but now (God) commandeth all men everywhere to repent-

(Acts 17:30).

Down in the deepest reaches of your heart you know what sins are separating you for God. In your finer moments you long to be reconciled to your Maker. This reconciliation can never be realized as long as you choose to remain in your sinful condition. God can save you from your sins, but He can never save you in your sins. Today you are -dead in trespasses and sins.- You can never be made -alive unto God- until you become -dead unto sin- (Read Ephesians 2:1-5; Colossians 2:13; and Romans 6:2).

The decision is yours to make. The road back to God is open to all who have the courage and the character to walk in it. Remember the words of Jesus: -Except ye repent, ye shall all...perish- (Luke 13:3, 5). Repentance is but one of the conditions upon which we can receive the salvation of God. It is no more nor less important than the others; but this much is certain: **NO MAN CAN BE SAVED WHO WILL NOT REPENT.**

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