

Revival and Reformation

Confession and Repentance: The Conditions of Revival

Lesson #6 for August 10, 2013

Scriptures: Acts 5:30-32; 2 Corinthians 7:9-11; Leviticus 5:5; 1 John 1:9; Hebrews 12:17; Psalm 32:1-8.

1. There are some outstanding examples of the importance of repentance and confession in Scripture. Psalm 32 and Psalm 51 tell of David's confession of his sin with Bathsheba and its results. But, no doubt, the greatest and most impressive example of confession and repentance would be the story of the time the disciples and others spent in the upper room between the ascension of Jesus and the day of Pentecost. And what an incredible result!
2. Read Matthew 18:1; Luke 9:46; and 22:24. The most incredible thing about Luke 22:24 is that the verse places it in the context of the upper room the night before Jesus was arrested! Was it really true that the disciples were arguing among themselves about who would be greatest even at that point in history? What changed over the next 50 days that made the blessings and results at Pentecost possible? How were the disciples impacted by the crucifixion and the resurrection? Read Acts 4:13; 5:30-32.
3. What is the role of repentance and confession in the lives of Christians? Is there a false kind of repentance? What is the difference between repentance and confession?
4. Read *Acts of the Apostles* 35.1-37.3. Notice what had happened to the disciples as a result of the previous seven weeks experience. Before Jesus died, they were ready to follow Him something like sheep and to let Him do all the work. But, when they recognized that their best Friend was in heaven at the right hand of God, they were fearless and moved forward with bold assertions, even before the Sanhedrin. (Acts 5:30-32) Is it any surprise that repentance and confession are spoken about frequently in the book of Acts when the disciples had had such a remarkable response at Pentecost? And surely, Paul understood the importance of repentance and confession.
5. What is implied by Romans 2:4? Why is it that "the goodness of God" is to lead us to repentance? Can that goodness be seen even in the Old Testament? And since God's goodness is unlimited, what keeps us from repenting? How many of us allow our selfish natures to get the best of us so that we are reluctant to admit that we might have done something wrong? Surely, we do not think that we can fool God!
6. In his correspondence with the church at Corinth, Paul apparently wrote four letters. First Corinthians 5:9 mentions a previous letter written before 1 Corinthians. Then, 1 Corinthians as we know it was written. Then, Paul made a brief and very discouraging visit to Corinth during which they apparently were very rude to him. (When he returned to Corinth later, he said it was his third visit. See 2 Corinthians 12:14; 13:1) He went back to Ephesus; and with a lot of prayer, he decided to write a very strong letter to them. It is possible that that letter is preserved in 2 Corinthians 10-13. The good news is that that letter worked, and they repented of their evil ways. But, Paul became very anxious to get their response. After sending Titus to Corinth with that letter to straighten things out, he waited for a long time with no answer back. Finally, he traveled on foot all the way to Troas and then to Philippi where, finally, he met Titus who gave him the good news that that strong letter had done its work. Paul commented about that strong letter in 2 Corinthians 7:9-16. Sometimes, we need a very strong urging to correct our ways!
7. When we were young, many of us learned that it was necessary every night to kneel down beside the bed and make sure we confessed all our sins. If you somehow forgot one and did

not ask for forgiveness, your case was lost! It was a very scary idea.

8. Fortunately, a more careful look at Scripture gives us a different picture about God's love and His care for sinners. In Jeremiah 31:31-34, God talked about how He will repair our sinful lives in what is described as a new covenant. He said, "I will forgive their sins and I will no longer remember their wrongs." (Jeremiah 31:34, *GNB*) Everyone needs forgiveness.
9. But, I believe the whole approach of trying to remember all our sins and ruminate over them in order to ask forgiveness for them is a wrong approach.

It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence. Man will never rise higher than his standard of purity or goodness or truth. If self is his loftiest ideal, he will never attain to anything more exalted. Rather, he will constantly sink lower and lower. The grace of God alone has power to exalt man. Left to himself, his course must inevitably be downward. (*Great Controversy* 555.1; compare *FLB* 150.2)

While we cannot do anything to change our hearts or to bring ourselves into harmony with God; while we must not trust at all to ourselves or our good works, our lives will reveal whether the grace of God is dwelling within us. A change will be seen in the character, the habits, the pursuits. The contrast will be clear and decided between what they have been and what they are. **The character is revealed, not [58] by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts.** (*SC* 57.2)

10. Confession and repentance are essential; but, God is not looking over the records trying by all means possible to find any mistake that is still left in our lives. He asks us to look at the life and experience of Jesus and, as far as possible, follow His example. We need to be sorry for and repent of any wrongdoing, but to focus on our previous wrongdoings will often lead us deeper and deeper into wrongdoing! God tells us to look away from our sins and focus our attention on Jesus as more and more we practice living like Him. You cannot stamp out sin; you can only crowd it out.
11. Read 1 Timothy 1:14-17. Do you agree that Paul was the worst of sinners? Why did he make such a statement? We usually mention the fact that he had previously persecuted and even killed Christians. But even in those days, he believed he was doing what was right! And he certainly confessed his sins when he realized the truth. Paul was not trying to set himself up as some kind of personal model; he was saying, "Look what Jesus did for me!"
12. How does God deal with sinners? Look at the story of Mary Magdalene. (See Luke 8:1-3) And what about her uncle Simon, the former leper and Pharisee? (Luke 7:36-50) Even the story of Judas is an incredible example of God's patience and love toward His sinful children.
13. Is there any question in your mind about God's forgiveness? (1 John 1:9; Isaiah 1:16-18)
14. So, how do we correctly confess our sins before God?

True confession is always of a specific character, and acknowledges particular sins. They may be of such a nature as to be brought before God only; they may be wrongs that should be confessed to individuals who have suffered injury through them; or they may be of a public character, and should then be as publicly confessed. But all confession should be definite and to the point, acknowledging the very sins of which you are guilty.—Ellen G. White, *Steps*

15. And what will be the result of our receiving forgiveness from God? We should be prepared to forgive those who have wronged us.
16. There are some examples in the Bible of false repentance. Look at the cases of Pharaoh, Balaam, Esau, and Judas. (Exodus 12:29-32; Numbers 22:32-35; Hebrews 12:17; and Matthew 27:4) What was wrong with their repentance? Those gentlemen were not sorry for their sins; they were just sorry for the results! And the repentance came too late.
17. What has been your personal experience? Are you consistently repenting of your sins? Or, just of the consequences of your sins?
18. To repent consists of at least three things: 1) Genuine sorrow that we have hurt God. 2) Admission of our guilt, and confession of the specific sin which we have committed. 3) A determination to turn away from that sin. The ultimate result of true confession and repentance is a reformed life.
19. Read Psalm 32:1-8. What do you learn there about David's experience? How does it compare with your own?
20. Is there a proper role for guilt? If we recognize our mistakes and our sins and feel guilty and if that feeling of guilt leads us to correct the problem as far as possible, the result is wonderful. But, if the guilt is just a bad feeling, it can be dangerous.

This feeling of guiltiness must be laid at the foot of the cross of Calvary. The sense of sinfulness has poisoned the springs of life and of true happiness. Now Jesus says, "Lay it all on Me. I will take your sins. I will give you peace. Banish no longer your self-respect, for I have bought you with the price of My own blood. You are mine. Your weakened will I will strengthen; your remorse for sin I will remove."—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 9, p. 305.

21. Have you ever had the experience of repenting and confessing of a sin and still having it bother you even for a considerable period of time? Why is that? For one thing, clearly, the Devil does not want us to confess and repent of our sins and then reform our lives, leaving those sins behind! But also, there are times when our sins hurt other people. And it may be necessary for us to confess those sins and repent to those people.

Confession will not be acceptable to God without sincere repentance and reformation. There must be decided changes in the life; everything offensive to God must be put away. This will be the result of genuine sorrow for sin. The work that we have to do on our part is plainly set before us: "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." Isaiah 1:16, 17. "If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die." Ezekiel 33:15.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 39.

22. Have you ever wondered how forgiving God really is? Read Luke 23:34. Can you imagine forgiving people who are crucifying You unjustly?
23. Can you remember a time when you confessed a sin and felt a great burden roll off your mind?
24. How much do you think Paul looked back to the time when he was persecuting Christians? Was that a constant problem for him? Did he continually feel guilty? Or, did he accept God's

forgiveness?

25. We suggested earlier that the best example in Scripture of true confession and repentance is the story of the upper room just before Pentecost. Do you think such an experience could happen again? Could it happen in your church or your Sabbath School? What is it that is preventing such an experience from happening all over the world? When the latter rain finally falls on God's true people at the end, will that kind of experience be repeated?
26. Counselors have discovered that people who come to them but are not willing to tell the full truth often do not get relief from their problems. When the full truth comes out and they face the problem and deal with the problem with the help of a true Christian counselor, the result is often remarkable.
27. Are we honest in our prayers? Surely, we recognize that God already knows the truth!
28. Read James 5:16. What kind of sins was James talking about? The book of James is clearly focusing on relationships within the church family. Then, would those sins be sins against other Christians?
29. We recognize that we are all naturally born sinners. As a result of our heredity, our natural tendencies are evil. But, it is possible for us to be reborn as Christians. When that happens through baptism, what happens to our old nature? Does the Christian life suddenly become much easier to live? Not at all! When we truly seek to draw near to Jesus and to leave our sinful practices behind, in many cases the Devil works even harder! But, the forgiveness of God can overrule all of that. And if we come to honor Him and rest in His forgiveness as we gradually become more and more like Him, it will be wonderful. The Bible uses three different words for sin: *transgression*, *sin*, and *iniquity*.

Each one has a different shade of meaning in the original language. Transgression implies willful rebellion against the will of God. In this passage, the word for "sin" means "missing the mark" or "failing to obey God's commands." Iniquity has to do with moral distortion or crookedness. True joy, perfect peace, and inner contentment come when we confess our sins and acknowledge our guilt before God. The grace of God is fully capable of covering our transgressions, sins, and iniquities. There is nothing for which His righteousness cannot atone. *Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 75.

30. Apparently, unconfessed sins keep the Holy Spirit from blessing us in many ways that He would like to. Why is that? Are there unconfessed sins in our lives that are robbing us of the Holy Spirit's blessings? Is that because the Holy Spirit refuses to work with anyone who is a sinner? Obviously, that cannot be the truth! It must be that when we hold onto our sins, there is no room for the Holy Spirit in our lives.
31. As you have studied this lesson, can you think of anything who stands between you and a better relationship with Jesus Christ? Or, is there something between you and another human being you may have wronged? Even on a Sabbath, wouldn't it be a wonderful thing to clear those obstacles away and open up a new and joyous Christian life?

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