

Present Truth in Deuteronomy Turn Their Hearts

Lesson #9 for November 27, 2021

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 4:25-31; 5:22-29; 30:1-10; Matthew 3:1-8; Mark 1:15; Acts 2:37-38.

1. **A simple fact of life follows us all: we are sinful. Occasionally we hear some “expert” bemoan the Christian idea of basic human corruption, but all one has to do is look at the news for a day or so or take a quick survey of human history, and the truthfulness of this Christian doctrine becomes apparent.**

Or, even easier, all one has to do is look in the mirror; not that far, actually. Whoever has the courage to take a long look deep inside one’s own heart (which can be a scary place to go) knows the truthfulness of **Romans 3:9-23**, which ends with the words “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (*Rom. 3:23, NKJV*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sabbath Afternoon, November 20.^{†§}

2. Romans 3:9-23 quotes several passages from Psalms and Isaiah describing how sinful we all are. Think about the context in which Paul quoted those passages.

Romans 3:1-4,24-26: ¹Have the Jews then any advantage over the Gentiles? Or is there any value in being circumcised? ²Much, indeed, in every way! In the first place, God trusted his message to the Jews. ³But what if some of them were not faithful? Does this mean that God will not be faithful? ⁴Certainly not! God must be true, even though every human being is a liar. As the scripture says,

“You must be shown to be right when you speak;
you must win your case when you are being tried.”...

²⁴But by the free gift of God’s grace all are put right with him through Christ Jesus, who sets them free.

²⁵⁻²⁶**God offered him, so that by his blood** [Footnote says: 3:25-26 *by his blood; or by his sacrificial death.*] **he should become the means by which people’s sins are forgiven through their faith in him. God did this in order to demonstrate that he is righteous. In the past he was patient and overlooked people’s sins; but in the present time he deals with their sins, in order to demonstrate his righteousness. In this way God shows that he himself is righteous and that he puts right everyone who believes in Jesus.**—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Romans 3:1-4,24-26). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].^{†§}

3. In Romans 3, God is being judged; sinners are being proven sinful! Could it be true that salvation comes through a careful study of the life and death of Jesus Christ?
4. So, what is involved in repentance. Do we really understand it?

Repentance includes sorrow for sin and a turning away from it. We shall not renounce sin unless we see its sinfulness; until we turn away from it in heart, there will be no real change in the life.

There are many who fail to understand the true nature of repentance. Multitudes sorrow that they have sinned and even make an outward reformation because they fear that their wrongdoing will bring suffering upon themselves. But this is not repentance in the Bible sense. They lament the suffering rather than the sin. Such was the grief of Esau when he saw that the birthright was lost to him forever. Balaam, terrified by the angel standing in his pathway with drawn sword, acknowledged his guilt lest he should lose his life; but there was no genuine repentance for sin, no conversion of purpose, no abhorrence of evil. Judas Iscariot, after betraying his [24] Lord, exclaimed, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." Matthew 27:4.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ** 23.2-24.0.†

5. All languages have idioms. Idioms are short expressions that say one thing; but, everyone knows they mean something quite different. In Hebrew there is an expression *mi yitten* which literally means "who will give" or "who will make it happen." It is sometimes translated just "O"; or, more commonly "if only" as in verse 29 below.

Deuteronomy 5:22-29: ²² "These are the commandments the LORD gave to all of you when you were gathered at the mountain. When he spoke with a mighty voice from the fire and from the thick clouds, he gave these commandments and no others. Then he wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me.

²³ "When the whole mountain was on fire and you heard the voice from the darkness, your leaders and the chiefs of your tribes came to me ²⁴and said, 'The LORD our God showed us his greatness and his glory when we heard him speak from the fire! Today we have seen that it is possible for a human being to continue to live, even though God has spoken to him. ²⁵But why should we risk death again? That terrible fire will destroy us. We are sure to die if we hear the LORD our God speak again. ²⁶Has any human being ever lived after hearing the living God speak from a fire? ²⁷Go back, Moses, and listen to everything that the LORD our God says. Then return and tell us what he said to you. We will listen and obey.' [Compare Exodus 20:18–21.]

²⁸ "When the LORD heard this, he said to me, 'I have heard what these people said, and they are right. ²⁹**If only** they would always feel like this! **If only** they would always honour me and obey all my commands, so that everything would go well with them and their descendants for ever.'"—*Good News Bible*.*†‡

Here is the Lord—the Creator God, the One who made space, time, and matter, the One who spoke our world into existence, the One who breathed into Adam the breath of life—uttering a phrase generally associated with the weaknesses and limitations of humanity. What an example of the reality of free will! Here we see that there are limits to what God can do in the midst of the great controversy. This use of *mi-yitten* reveals that even God can't trample on free will; for the moment He did, it would no longer be free.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sunday, November 21. §

6. We need to remember that three times the children of Israel promised God that they would do whatever He asked them to do!

Exodus 19:8: Then all the people answered together, "**We will do everything that the LORD has said,**" and Moses reported this to the LORD.—*Good News*

Bible.†*

Exodus 24:3,7: ³Moses went and told the people all the LORD's commands and all the ordinances, and all the people answered together, "**We will do everything that the LORD has said.**"... ⁷Then he took the book of the covenant, in which the LORD's commands were written, and read it aloud to the people. They said, "**We will obey the LORD and do everything that he has commanded.**"—*Good News Bible.*†*

7. Is it really true that just as we are free to sin and turn against God, we are also free to choose to follow Him? What forces on both sides are pressuring us to either follow God or follow Satan? Isn't that a day-by-day experience? Truth vs. lies!
8. Some **critical scholars** do not believe that Moses could have written Deuteronomy because **they believe that not even God can predict the future**, and Deuteronomy so clearly spells out the future conditions that would happen to the Israelites. But, all through the Bible, God demonstrated His capacity to predict the future. Consider, especially the prophecies in Daniel and Revelation. Critical scholars say that if it is true that He can predict the future, then we have no free choice. But, God's foreknowledge, even of our free choices, has no bearing whatsoever on the freedom of our choices. God is not just learning on the job!
9. We as human beings cannot understand how God can know our future choices without there being some pre-determined reason for those choices that would then make those choices no longer free! But, He is God, and there are many things which God knows and understands that we have no knowledge of and cannot understand.
10. And so, in Deuteronomy we see that God predicted even the fact that the children of Israel would go into captivity.

Deuteronomy 4:25-28: ²⁵ "Even when you have been in the land a long time and have children and grandchildren, do not sin by making for yourselves an idol in any form at all. This is evil in the LORD's sight, and it will make him angry. ²⁶**I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today that, if you disobey me, you will soon disappear from the land. You will not live very long in the land across the Jordan that you are about to occupy. You will be completely destroyed.** ²⁷**The LORD will scatter you among other nations, where only a few of you will survive.** ²⁸**There you will serve gods made by human hands, gods of wood and stone, gods that cannot see or hear, eat or smell.**"—*Good News Bible.*†* [Compare Psalm 115.][‡]

11. Why were the children of Israel so tempted to worship pagan idols? Think of all the things that the pagans were worshiping in those days.
12. **Deuteronomy 4:15-20:** ¹⁵ "When the LORD spoke to you from the fire on Mount Sinai, you did not see any form. For your own good, then, make certain ¹⁶that you do not sin by making for yourselves an idol in any form at all—whether man or woman, ¹⁷animal or bird, ¹⁸reptile or fish. ¹⁹**Do not be tempted to worship and serve what you see in the sky—the sun, the moon, and the stars. The LORD your God has given these to all other peoples for them to worship.** ²⁰But you are the people he rescued from Egypt, that blazing furnace. He brought you out to make you his own people, as you are today."—*Good News Bible.*†*
13. These words seem very strange to some of us with our ethical thinking today. Was it really

true that God wanted some people in the world to worship the sun, the moon, and the stars? Even animals, birds, reptiles, or fish? What this is suggesting is that those people in those other lands in the days of Moses had chosen to worship those things as their gods. It is not suggesting that *Yahweh*, the Hebrew God, was the One who had caused it to happen.

14. It was commonly believed in the days of Moses that the world was divided up not only by countries, nationalities, languages, etc., but also by gods. Each territory was thought to be ruled by a different god.
15. What is amazing in all of this is that God repeatedly said that if the children of Israel would finally come back to Him, even after going into exile, He would receive them and bless them, once again.
16. **Deuteronomy 4:29-31:** ²⁹ “There you will look for the LORD your God, and **if you search for him with all your heart, you will find him.** ³⁰When you are in trouble and all those things happen to you, then you will finally turn to the LORD and obey him. ³¹He is a merciful God. He will not abandon you or destroy you, and **he will not forget the covenant that he himself made with your ancestors.**”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}
17. At this point in our study, we might be tempted to think that we do not worship any pagan gods. But, what are the worst sins of which we need to repent?

God does not regard all sins as of equal magnitude; there are degrees of guilt in His estimation, as well as in that of man; but however trifling this or that wrong act may seem in the eyes of men, no sin is small in the sight of God. Man’s judgment is partial, imperfect; but God estimates all things as they really are. **The drunkard is despised and is told that his sin will exclude him from heaven; while pride, selfishness, and covetousness too often go unrebuked. But these are sins that are especially offensive to God; for they are contrary to the benevolence of His character, to that unselfish love which is the very atmosphere of the unfallen universe.** He who falls into some of the grosser sins may feel a sense of his shame and poverty and his need of the grace of Christ; but pride feels no need, and so it closes the heart against Christ and the infinite blessings He came to give.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*^{*} 30.1.[†]

18. These ideas in Deuteronomy are also reflected in the New Testament.
Galatians 6:7-8: ⁷ Do not deceive yourselves; no one makes a fool of God. People will reap exactly what they sow. ⁸If they sow in the field of their natural desires, from it they will gather the harvest of death; if they sow in the field of the Spirit, from the Spirit they will gather the harvest of eternal life.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}
19. So, why is sinning so natural, almost like breathing? And what is God’s response even if we depart very far from Him?

Deuteronomy 30:1-10: ¹ “I have now given you a choice between a blessing and a curse. When all these things have happened to you, and you are living among the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you, you will remember the choice I gave you. ²If you and your descendants will turn back to the LORD and with all your heart obey his commands that I am giving you today, ³then the LORD your God will have mercy on you. He will bring you back from the nations where he has scattered you, and he will make you prosperous again.

⁴Even if you are scattered to the farthest corners of the earth, the LORD your God will gather you together and bring you back, ⁵so that you may again take possession of the land where your ancestors once lived. And he will make you more prosperous and more numerous than your ancestors ever were. ⁶The LORD your God will give you and your descendants obedient hearts, so that you will love him with all your heart, and you will continue to live in that land. ⁷He will turn all these curses against your enemies, who hated you and oppressed you, ⁸and you will again obey him and keep all his commands that I am giving you today. ⁹The LORD will make you prosperous in all that you do; you will have many children and a lot of livestock, and your fields will produce abundant crops. He will be as glad to make you prosperous as he was to make your ancestors prosperous, ¹⁰but you will have to obey him and keep all his laws that are written in this book of his teachings. You will have to turn to him with all your heart.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

20. We may mess up terribly, and the consequences will follow. But, if we return to God, He will always take us back. There is no sin that God is not willing to forgive. So, what is implied when we say that we want to repent or turn back to God? What is the real nature of repentance?

The Bible does not teach that the sinner must repent before he can heed the invitation of Christ, “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28. It is the virtue that goes forth from Christ, that leads to genuine repentance. Peter made the matter clear in his statement to the Israelites when he said, “Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” Acts 5:31. **We can no more repent without the Spirit of Christ to awaken the conscience than we can be pardoned without Christ.**—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ** 26.2.[†]

21. But, let us be honest. Repentance is not a simple choice. It involves a complete change in thinking. **God is willing to change our hearts if we are willing to allow Him to do so.** And if our hearts are changed, our actions will change. That is what is known as *obedience*.

All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, **He will so identify Himself** with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. **The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.**—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages** 668.3.[†]

22. In the case of the children of Israel, God was willing to take back even those who had lived their entire lives in captivity in Babylon or Assyria.
23. When Peter spoke to the people after the resurrection of Christ on the great day of Pentecost, he made this comment:

Acts 5:31: “God raised him to his right-hand side as Leader and Saviour, to give the

people of Israel the opportunity to repent and have their sins forgiven.”—*Good News Bible*.*

24. Ellen White, commenting upon similar situation, said:

The people mourned because their sins had brought suffering upon themselves, but not because they had dishonored God by transgression of His holy law. **True repentance is more than sorrow for sin. It is a resolute turning away from evil.**—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 557.2.†

25. What difference is there between being sorry for the consequences of our sins and being sorry for the sin itself? Why is this distinction so important? When they began their ministries, both John the Baptist and Jesus called for people to repent and turn away from their sins.

Matthew 3:1-8: ¹At that time John the Baptist came to the desert of Judea and started preaching. ² **“Turn away from your sins,”** he said, “because the Kingdom of heaven is near!” ³John was the man the prophet Isaiah was talking about when he said:

“Someone is shouting in the desert,
‘Prepare a road for the Lord;
make a straight path for him to travel!’ ”

⁴ John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair; he wore a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵People came to him from Jerusalem, from the whole province of Judea, and from all the country near the River Jordan. ⁶They confessed their sins, and he baptized them in the Jordan.

⁷ When John saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to him to be baptized, he said to them, “You snakes—who told you that you could escape from the punishment God is about to send? ⁸Do those things that will show that you have turned from your sins.”—*Good News Bible*.*†

26. Read Mark 1:15. What did Jesus say? Why did He relate repentance with the gospel?

Mark 1:15: “The right time has come,” he said, “and the Kingdom of God is near! **Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News!**”—*Good News Bible*.*†

27. So, what is the sequence that affects people who turn back to God? What is the relationship among repentance, conversion, justification, and sanctification? Notice these interesting words from Ellen White.

At every advance step in Christian experience our repentance will deepen. It is to those whom the Lord has forgiven, to those whom He acknowledges as His people, that He says, “Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight.” Ezekiel 36:31. Again He says, “I will establish My covenant with thee, and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God.” Ezekiel 16:62, 63. Then our lips will not be opened in self-glorification. We shall know that our sufficiency is in Christ alone. We shall make the apostle’s confession our own. “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good

thing.” Romans 7:18. “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” Galatians 6:14.—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons** 160.3.

“The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.” Romans 2:4. A golden chain, the mercy and compassion of divine love, is passed around every imperiled soul. The Lord declares, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.” Jeremiah 31:3.—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons** 202.1.

28. Let us not make the mistake of thinking that repenting alone is some kind of good deed that will bring us merit with God. Does the realization of our sinfulness help us to be humble?
29. What is the path for returning to God when we have wandered away from Him? We must honestly want to seek Him. When we honestly return to Him, God’s forgiveness is automatic. But, the return must include a true change of heart. And in the case of the children of Israel, this would have resulted in the fulfillment of the wonderful prophecies that were given to them.
30. So, what is your understanding of God’s character? When you think about God, do you believe that He really, really, honestly wants you to come back?

Luke 15:7: “In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 respectable people who do not need to repent.”—*Good News Bible*.*

31. There is no merit in our repentance. Our previous sinful ways would naturally only lead to death. But, God’s graciousness, loving-kindness, and forgiveness look over those previous sins and welcome us back with rejoicing if we are willing to change.
32. We might be frightened to think about the holiness of God; it might scare us even to approach Him. What did the children of Israel say after God appeared to them on Mount Sinai? Reading again:

Deuteronomy 5:24-25: “...²⁴and said, ‘The LORD our God showed us his greatness and his glory when we heard him speak from the fire! Today we have seen that it is possible for a human being to continue to live, even though God has spoken to him.²⁵But why should we risk death again? That terrible fire will destroy us. We are sure to die if we hear the LORD our God speak again.’”—*Good News Bible*.*

33. But, surely we have learned in our lesson this week that God will accept back anyone who is willing to really come back.
34. Consider this true story.

Simon Wiesenthal, the Nazi hunter, tells the story of his encounter with a former Nazi officer who was dying in a hospital. The Nazi asked Wiesenthal to forgive him for the horrific crimes he had committed against Jewish civilians, without which, he claimed, he could not die in peace. Wiesenthal, who kept silence throughout the encounter, walked away without responding to the Nazi’s request. Wiesenthal concludes the story with a question: “What would you have done?”—Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower* (London: W. H. Allen, 1970), p. 99.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 121].^{‡§}

35. How would you have responded in that situation?

Interestingly, the [Hebrew] root *shuv* combines in itself both requirements to turn from evil and to turn back to God, who will be found again on “the old paths.” This parallel movement implies a profound insight: the best way to resist evil is to do good.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 121.†§

36. Just as the children of Israel found it impossible to transform themselves, God recognizes that it is true also of us.

Deuteronomy 10:16: “So then, from now on be obedient to the LORD and stop being stubborn.”—*Good News Bible.**

Jeremiah 4:22: The LORD says, “My people are stupid; they don’t know me. They are like foolish children; they have no understanding. They are experts at doing what is evil, but failures at doing what is good.”—*Good News Bible.**

Jeremiah 13:23: Can a Nubian change the colour of his skin, or a leopard remove its spots? If they could, then you that do nothing but evil could learn to do what is right.—*Good News Bible.**

Hosea 5:4: The evil that the people have done prevents them from returning to their God. Idolatry has a powerful hold on them, and they do not acknowledge the LORD.—*Good News Bible.**

37. Why is it impossible for sinners to transform themselves? Do we recognize the fact that only God can perform such a procedure? Are we willing to allow Him to do that?

38. When we think very carefully about the life and death of Jesus Christ and if we agree, God will transform us and give us the desire to be more like Him. To know God is to love Him.

39. Think of your personal experiences. Have you sinned against someone and asked for their forgiveness? Did you need to do it more than once?

40. Here is an exercise that we are asked to try: Think of someone that you trust; it may be a spouse, son, daughter, or someone else close to you. Then, explain to that person that you are going to pick a particular day, it could be anything from Sabbath to Christmas; you are going to record your failures, regrets, and your victories for one week prior to that day. What should we learn from such an experiment? How often do we repeat the same mistakes again and again and again? Review the experience of David with Bathsheba? Again read Psalm 51. Are we prepared to do what David did to honestly want to change and be willing to let God do that for us?

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