Laying the Foundation

Lesson 4

REPENTANCE PRODUCES FRUIT

Catechism Two, Lesson 4

Reading: Matthew 3:1–12

1. What Is The Difference Between Repentance And Remorse?

Remorse is a feeling of deep regret, of hopelessness, and even of despair. It does not lead to constructive change, nor does it help us to believe God. Repentance, on the other hand, causes us to turn away from sin and opens us to receive the next gift from God—faith. Remorse is destructive; it turns us against ourselves. Repentance is life-giving; it turns us to God.

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death (2 Cor. 7:10).

A. King Saul realized too late that his sin had cost him the kingdom.

Instead of repenting, attempting reconciliation of any sort, or seeking reconciliation with David, Saul allowed despair to lead him to suicide. He permitted his emotion of remorse to turn him against himself. In contrast, David sought the Lord with fasting, self-humiliation, and honest confession when his sin was exposed. The heart of his prayer was that a right spirit toward God be renewed within him; his primary concern was not the alleviation or avoidance of penalty. David accepted the Lord’s chastening and was made a better man through the experience. (See 1 Sam. 31:4, 5; 2 Sam. 12:1–25; Psa. 51.)

B. Judas punished himself for betraying Jesus.

Judas soon realized what he had done in betraying Jesus. He sought to return the thirty pieces of silver. But instead of returning to Jesus for restoration, he went and hanged himself. Again, remorse and despair led to self-destruction. In contrast, Peter wept bitterly when he discovered the deep significance of his denying the Lord. But Peter repented; he did not stop with emotions of regret. He changed his ways and found stability he had never found before. (See Matt. 27:3–10; Acts 1:16–19; Luke 22:54–62.)

2. What Does The Bible Mean By “Fruits Meet For Repentance”?

In modern language, God is saying, “Let your tree show the evidence of your inner change.” Fruit refers both to outward behavior and inner attitudes. We cannot change ourselves without the Holy Spirit’s work of regeneration. Once He has begun to renew us from within, we can cooperate by obeying His commandments. The Greek word for regeneration, palingenesia, means “to be born again.” The evidence of any birth is subsequent life. If we have experienced regeneration, we have new life from God and this is apparent in the way we live. By testing the fruit of our character, people can tell what our root truly is: sin or God.

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour (Tit. 3:5, 6).

A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.…Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them (Matt. 7:18, 20).

A. It means the opposite of religious self-righteousness—knowledge of need for change.

The Pharisees and Sadducees came to John’s baptism because everyone was doing it. It was the fad of the day. But they did not understand the spiritual significance of John’s baptism; it was another outward form like everything else they did. John was calling their attention to the fact that this was something real; if it didn’t touch the inner life, they had completely missed it. This lesson still speaks today. It is so much easier to go through a ceremony than to admit that a deeper need exists.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham (Matt. 3:7–9).

The Jewish leaders were hindered from experiencing genuine repentance because they based their confidence on secondhand religion.

B. It is the opposite of idolatry and materialism.

The Jews were not the only ones who had trouble with repentance. The Gentiles had made their own gods to worship. Sometimes they worshipped idols in the religious sense of ceremonies, offerings, etc. Sometimes they merely exalted the values of this world to take the place of God: money, status, education, military power, etc. But whichever way they did it, they filled their lives with something other than God, and thus deceived themselves.

Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance (Acts 26:19, 20).

C. It is the opposite of works to merit God’s favor.

We can do nothing to earn God’s favor; He is already offering this to us freely by grace. As long as we are still working for our salvation in any sense, true repentance eludes us. We must allow God to make us aware of our bankruptcy and inability to please Him—we call this awareness “poverty of spirit.” Dead men can only produce dead works. Our works may impress other men, but until we are drawing from God as our source, all we do is only “dead works.”

For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death (Rom. 7:5).

3. How Does God Give Man Repentance?

Repentance is a gift from God. Man is enabled to repent because God works upon and within him. Our own efforts only get in God’s way. God uses both external and internal means to turn a man to Himself.

A. The revelation of God’s goodness leads to repentance.

God reveals the goodness of His character to men in order to lead them to repentance. He does this through a general providence, sending rain and sunshine upon the just and the unjust. He also does it through special favor. God may show His goodness to a man through kindness and mercy in circumstances.

Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? (Rom. 2:4).

B. God’s sovereign call draws men to repentance.

I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Matt. 9:13).

C. God uses the ministry of His Word to create repentance in the heart of man.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart … (Acts 2:37).

D. God uses reproof, rebuke, and chastening to prod men to repentance.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent (Rev. 3:19).

E. God may stir us to pray for Him to turn us.

When we find that we cannot turn and know that we should, we can ask God to turn us. God’s answer to this prayer may involve chastening through circumstances.

… turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth(Jer. 31:18, 19).

4. What Are The Manifestations Of Repentance?

Repentance is an inner matter, an inward action of the soul. But it also has several outward expressions through our actions. God’s purpose in repentance is to turn us around. For this reason, all genuine repentance will be seen in the change of direction it produces in the daily life. The four basic manifestations of genuine repentance are:

A. Specific confession of sin to God.

True repentance results in confession to God. We do not merely repent “in general,” but we specifically name our sins to God and admit that we are wrong, as we ask His forgiveness. We never begin our petition for forgiveness with words such as these: “If I have done anything wrong.…” When we come to Christ for the first time, our acknowledgment must include the fact that we are sinners. From this point on, we merely need to mention the specific areas in which we have offended Him. Confession means putting into words and telling Him you are sorry.

When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin (Psa. 32:3–5).

B. Restitution to man.

True repentance will lead us to make things right with other people. We will make restitution where this is necessary. We will do all in our power to repair wounded relationships. We must be particularly careful to keep our relationships flowing in up-to-date love toward those we call “brothers.” We only love God as much as we love those who are a part of Him.

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much (James 5:16).

C. The forsaking of sin.

True repentance means turning away from sin and leaving it behind. We must not only confess our sins, but forsake them. This means that we determine to be done with them.

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy (Prov. 28:13).

D. Water baptism.

Initial repentance prepares a person for water baptism. If the repentance is deep and thorough, and the individual has been properly instructed about water baptism for the remission of sins, he will express his repentance by submission to water baptism. This was standard procedure in the early Church.

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38).

The complete renunciation of our life as a sinner includes water baptism. It is in the waters of baptism that we make this choice final by burying the person we were, in order to rise to newness of life. John the Baptist, Jesus, and later the disciples told the people to whom they ministered, “If you are truly repentant and have turned toward God, you will gladly demonstrate this through submitting to baptism.” They did not consider the work of repentance complete until it was expressed in obedience to baptism.

Home Study: Lesson 4

Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. How does repentance differ from remorse?

2. What does the Bible mean by “fruit”?

3. List five means God uses to bring man to repentance.

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

4. What four manifestations must accompany repentance?

a.

b.

c.

d.

5. What is “poverty of spirit”?