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Faith Bible Church

True Repentance Selected

Introduction

Henry Emerson Fosdick was a strong proponent of "Situational Ethics" - i.e. there are no absolute standards, but each situation is evaluated individually according to one's own moral judgment. In the book of Judges this was referred to as *"each one doing what was right in their own eyes."*

It should be understood that situational ethics is pretty much the accepted value system of our society. The absolute standards of the Bible have been rejected. We are told that we can not impose our moral stands on others, though it is okay for them to impose their immoral standards on us.

The reason that I bring this up is that it affects us in the church as well. New Christians have come out of society and are in the process of changing their value systems, and people who are in the church work within our society, and therefore they are affected by society's value system as well. For these reasons, the moral value system of situational ethics does affect us in the church. And one area that we can see its effect is in our idea of what is sin and what is not sin.

God gives us not only a lot of black and white commandments concerning what is and is not sin (murder, stealing, lying, adultery, etc.), but he also gives us principles and precepts by which we are to apply His will to the situations we face today (drug abuse; the "sexual revolution;" illegal reproduction of video & audio tapes, and computer programs; abortion; etc.). Situational Ethics gives excuses for drug abuse such as he had no choice; it was his environment; selling drugs was the only way to get ahead; I'm not hurting anyone else, etc. It gives excuses for sexual immorality with such things as claiming: its natural; its just biology; He/she is my significant other; it was the only way I could show him/her I love them. It gives excuses for abortion such as: they can not afford the child; they have too many already; it was an accident; the doctor said the child would be handicapped; She is a victim of rape or incest and it would be too unfeeling to have her carry the child to term. It allows excuses for illegal computer software reproduction: my friend did it for me; that company makes enough anyway; it's too expensive and I need it.

Situational ethics have changed the way we view sin and a result it has also changed the way we view repentance. If sin is no longer sin, then is repentance needed? And if sin can be justified by the circumstances, then is true repentance really required? But then again, what is true repentance?

That is the subject for today's message. What is true repentance? Figures vary a lot, but something over 40% of Americans profess to be "Born Again" and profess to be Christians, yet there is little or no evidence to give confirmation of that profession. So many people claim that they love Jesus, yet they live in direct disobedience to both His direct commandments and the principles and precepts by which He wants us to live. Why are so many excuses given for sin? And why are we, as Christians, so willing to make excuses for those in sin? Maybe it is in part because we 1) No longer recognize sin to be what it is, and 2) if we do recognize sin we say, so what? And 3) we no longer understand what repentance is and why it is important.

The Importance of Repentance

Let me begin by stressing the importance of repentance. When Jesus began his ministry, He did so by preaching *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel"* (Mark 1:15). When Jesus sent out the Apostles, He told them to preach that *"repentance and forgiveness for sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations"* (Luke 24). The gospel is a two edged sword. One edge is believe, and the other is to repent. Salvation is by faith alone, but real faith is always accompanied by repentance.

Peter preached this in Acts 2:38 saying *"Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins . . ."* Paul also preached repentance. Paul told the

Athenians, *"In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent"* (Acts 17:30). In Acts 20:21 Paul summed up his ministry by saying he *"declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."*

Repentance is not an option for salvation. You don't go to heaven without it. Repentance is not an option for living the Christian life either. When a Christian sins, repentance is also necessary to restore one's relationship both with God and with those sinned against. In the book of Revelation a reoccurring theme in the letters to the seven Churches in chapters 2 & 3 is repentance.

Jesus says to the church at Ephesus, *"Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first . . ."* To the church at Pergamum Jesus says, *". . . Repent therefore; or else I am coming quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth."* To the Church at Thyatira Jesus says, *". . . I gave her (Jezebel) time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds."* To the Church at Sardis Jesus says, *". . . Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent."* To the church at Laodicea Jesus says, *". . . Those who I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent."* Jesus was demanding repentance in order for fellowship with Him to be restored.

But again the question must be asked. What is repentance? Does it mean to feel sorry? To change one's mind? To regret? To turn around? Is it denoted by what a person thinks? What they say? What they do? What are the evidences of true repentance?

The Biblical concept of repentance comes from the usage of two Hebrew words and two Greek words. "Nacham" means to feel sorry. This is what God was when he looked at the sinfulness of man in Genesis 6. God was sorry that he made man. The word "Shubb" means to turn, turnabout or return. The key idea in this work is the change. This is a change of mind, plan, action, direction, etc. It starts in the heart and mind. The Greek word "metanoeo" is similar in meaning with a the root meaning is to *"know afterwards"* and it denotes a change of mind, taking a wiser view of the past with regret for what has been done resulting in a change of life for the better. This involves a volitional element. There is a choice to turnaround based on a change in the will. The other Greek word, "metamelomai" denotes close to the same thing but stresses the emotional element of negative retrospect. There is a change in direction, but there is also remorse.

As you can see, true repentance is more than just saying you are sorry, and sorrow itself is not necessarily a sign that any repentance has even occurred. The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Cor 7:9,10 that there is a Godly sorrow that leads to repentance, and a worldly sorrow that leads to death. He says, *"I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death."*

Many people say they are sorry for their sins, but there is no repentance. For the time remaining, I want to go over examples of such people and conclude with an example of true repentance. I am in debt to Bruce Jones of Moody Memorial Church for the outline of these examples. I picked it up from him in an article in Moody Monthly, October 1987.

DESPERATE REPENTANCE.

Probably the best example of this is Pharaoh at the time of Moses. God had told Pharaoh through Moses to *"let my people go,"* and to emphasize the point God was bringing plagues upon the land of Egypt. Pharaoh was getting desperate by the time God sent a deadly hailstorm. Exodus 9:27-30 tells us, *"Then Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, 'I have sinned this time; the LORD is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones. Make supplication to the LORD, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail; and I will let*

you go, and you shall stay no longer." But we all know what happened as soon as the storm stopped, verse 34 says, *"but when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart . . ."*

Desperate repentance describes those people who seriously consider Christ's claims when they are in trouble such as financial setbacks, marital problems, physical crises, etc. These people may even pray that if God will get them out of the mess, then they will do all sorts of things for God. Yet as soon as the crisis is over they return to their same sinful ways. Such was the supposed repentance of Pharaoh. It is not true repentance.

DOUBTFUL REPENTANCE

This is repentance that is questionable. Like Desperate Repentance, it is sparked by some pressure, but the goal of it is to try to gain an advantage. This has been seen in many cases where someone makes a profession of faith in Christ in order to marry a Christian partner who will not marry an unbeliever. Yet, a few months after the marriage, that person returns to his/her same unregenerate lifestyle. They used a supposed repentance to gain a personal advantage.

This would also describe the person who is caught in the midst of something and so are forced to confess. But if there is any sorrow involved it is just that they were caught. This may have been the case with Achan in Joshua 7. Achan was caught red handed with plunder from Ai. What could Achan do. He really had no choice but to confess, so he said, *"It is true! I have sinned against the LORD."* We really do not know if Achan was truly repentant because he was then executed. We often see this same kind of repentance in jails. In fact it is so common it is called "Jail House Conversion." They are great while in jail. They claim to love Christ. They read their Bible. They go to the services. They have good behavior. As a result of these things they can gain several advantages. The real test of their repentance is what they do once they are back in society again.

This is not to say that some do not genuinely repent in these situations. The thief on the cross repented and went to be with Christ in Paradise that day. But such conversions are rarely genuine. Jones cites a study done some years ago of hundreds of "death bed repentances" in which the person survived. Only three of them went on to live for God.

DOUBLE-MINDED REPENTANCE

Double-minded repentance describes those who will say, *"I have sinned,"* but they are not resolved to obey in the future. That is not repentance, it is double-mindedness. An example of this was the prophet Balaam. King Balak had asked Balaam to come and curse Israel for him and he would be paid well. Balaam already knew that he could not do such a thing, but off he went anyway. God sent an Angel to oppose him, and after a conversation with his donkey, Balaam saw the Angel and confessed, *"I have sinned"* (Num 22:34). Yet when Balaam had a chance to go back into the service of King Balak, he did so by advising Balak of how to get the children of Israel to sin (Num 31:16). There was no true repentance on the part of Balaam and he eventually was killed for it (Num 31:8).

DESPAIRING REPENTANCE

This kind of repentance is what Paul called "worldly sorrow" in 2 Cor 7. It is sorrow some people feel in regards to their bad habits such as alcoholism, drugs, adulterous affairs, immorality, etc. They are sorry that their sin has affected others, but their is no real repentance. To them it is just sad other people are hurt too.

This is the repentance that Judas had. Matt 27:3-5 records Judas' reactions to his betrayal of Jesus. *"Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, 'I have betrayed innocent blood.' But they said, 'What is that to us? See to that yourself!' And he threw the pieces of silver into the sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself."* Judas had sorrow, remorse, and regret, but no repentance. Worldly sorrow leads to death (2 Corinthians 7:10).

DELAYED REPENTANCE

When repentance is delayed, there may be costly consequences. Such was the case with David.

David had committed adultery with Bathsheba, but instead of repenting, he sought to hide his sin. First, he developed an elaborate scheme to bring Bathsheba's husband back from the front lines of the war with the hope that the child that would eventually be born would be thought to be Uraiah's. But Uraiah was too committed of a soldier and refused to be with his wife while his fellow soldiers were in the battle field. David then changed his scheme and plotted Uriah's death on the battlefield. And though David did not swing the sword himself, he nevertheless committed murder.

David then took Uriah's wife as his own, thinking that would solve the problem. But it did not. David's refusal to repent was even costly to himself. Psalm 32 records that during this time David could not sleep, his vitality drained from him, and his body wasted away. For nearly nine months David suffered from the guilt. Then Nathan the prophet confronted him about the sin. It was then that David finally repented, and Psalm 51 records David's repentance. I preached on that Psalm two years ago and called it "When You Sin." It records David's acknowledgment of sin, his confession to God, his plea for forgiveness and cleansing, and all through it is his humility in accepting both the responsibility and consequences brought about by his sin. Psalm 51 marks out the character of a truly repentant man.

Yet, because David delayed so long and committed more sin upon the first sin, there were grave consequences. Gal 6:7 was true then, and it is true now. *"God is not mocked, whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap."* One consequence was that the child born to David died (2 Sam. 12:14). Another consequence is that it played a role in the rebellion of Absalom a few years later. God is loving and quick to forgive, and delayed repentance may be true repentance, but there are consequences that can not be avoided.

TRUE REPENTANCE

I could use Psalm 51 to develop the nature of true repentance, but since I have done that in the past, and because our Lord gives a very clear example in one of his parables, I thought it best to use the story of the prodigal son.

In this parable, recorded in Luke 15, we see a young man squander all of his inheritance in "loose" living, or as the King James version says, *"riotous living."* We can imagine this young man spending all his money on wine, women and song. But when the money ran out, so did all his new found friends. He next finds himself working for a farmer feeding his swine. His situation was so bad he *"was longing to fill his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him"* (vs 16).

The first element of true repentance is recorded in verse 17. *"But when he came to his senses."* The first element of true repentance is a realization of your actual state because of your sin. That is followed by an understanding of where to go get the help that is needed. The very first step in coming to Christ is to be poor in spirit which is to realize that you are bankrupt and can do nothing on your own. You need some outside source to redeem you. The first element of true repentance is realization of sin.

The second element is mentioned in verse 18, but it is put into practice in verse 21. The son confesses and says, *"Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."* The son came and confessed his sins and renounced them. Proverbs 28:13 says, *"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy."* Isaiah 55:6,7 adds, *"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts, Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."* The son came confessing his sin, and by his statement that he was no longer worthy to be a son, we see that he was renouncing his sin. The second element step of true repentance is a renunciation of sin.

The third element is also seen in verse 21 in that the son confessed his sin to God and to his dad. The son was seeking reconciliation with both God and his dad. If we do not seek to

reconcile with others, then there is no way we can become reconciled with God. This is the point of Matt 5:23,24. If we know that someone has something against us, we seek to reconcile with them before we worship God. The third element of true repentance is Reconciliation from sin.

Some of you may remember the case of Cathleen Crowel Webb a few years ago. She had accused a man of raping her, that man was convicted and sent to prison. Six years later, Mrs Webb came to Christ and realized she had to confess that she had lied about Gary Dotson. She contacted some lawyers to get the ball rolling in trying to get the conviction overturned, and then she went to him personally and asked for his forgiveness. She sought reconciliation with him. A sign of true repentance.

The fourth element of true repentance is seen better in verse 19 than verse 21 because his father never let him finish all that he wanted to say. Verse 19 tells us that the son wanted to become one of his father's hired servants. An attempt to make restitution for what he had done to his dad. The story of Zacchaeus the tax collector also demonstrates this element of repentance. When Jesus came to visit him, Zacchaeus said, *"Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much."* And Jesus said to him, *"Today salvation has come to this house . . ."* The fourth element of true repentance is Restitution for sin.

True repentance is to bring us back to God. It brings us back to doing His will and not our own will. There is one parable that brings out very clearly that what a person says is meaningless if there is not corresponding action.

Matthew 21:28-31, Jesus says, *"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'son, go work today in the vineyard.' And he answered and said, 'I will, sir; and he did not go. And he came to the second and said the same thing. But he answered and said, 'I will not'; yet he afterward regretted it and went. Which of the two did the will of his father?"*

I ask you, who is the one who truly repents. The one who says the right things but does not do what is right and bring forth the fruits of repentance, or the one who may not say all the right things but does the right thing and brings forth the fruit of repentance. John the Baptist words were similar to those coming out to see him, *"bring forth the fruits that are in keeping with repentance."*

True repentance has four elements. 1. True repentance Recognizes its sin. 2. True repentance Renounces its sin. 3. True repentance seeks Reconciliation from sin. and 4. True repentance makes Restitution for sin.

When you sin, what kind of repentance marks us? Desperate, Doubtful, Double-Minded, Despairing, Delayed or true repentance. I pray it is the latter for that is what brings us back into fellowship with God and with those we sin against.

One last comment before we close. Last fall I preached a sermon on admonishing one another. In that sermon I stressed the fact that true Christian love is willing to risk rejection to admonish a fellow believer to bring them back into fellowship. David needed Nathan to come and confront him. Some of you need to be Nathan's. You know people that are in bondage to sin, yet you have done nothing or little about it. Maybe your afraid of being called "judgmental." If you do it Biblically, you will not be judgmental. If you are not sure how to do it Biblically, you need to pick up a copy of the tapes "When You Sin" on Psalm 51, and "Admonishing One Another" on Romans 15. Study out the passages of Scripture involved and then you will need to be obedient to God, not what other people think.

Maybe others of you know what to do, but you have been led astray by a person's false repentance. Jesus said we will know what a person is like by the fruit of their lives. Examine the fruit, not just the words. A person who says one thing, but never follows up with action is not repentant. That person needs a Nathan to come along side and confront them with the truth of God's word. To do anything less is unloving, because it leaves that person with a continued broken relationship with God. That person needs to come to repentance so that they can then experience the forgiveness of God. And whether we like it or not, forgiveness does not come without repentance.

Read Psalm 51 to close.