

Oak Lawn United Reformed Church

Preparatory Devotional

December 2022

A Sinner Who Is Penitent

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Introduction

This is the tenth Lord's supper preparatory devotional I have been blessed to write for our help and edification. I am so thankful for the opportunity to write these, and for your willingness to use them.

We are using these devotionals as a way that God the Holy Spirit is feeding and nurturing us. That feeding and nurture comes in the way of self-examination. The purpose is to know better who we are and, especially, Who Jesus Christ is, our Savior and Lord. Please make diligent use of this little devotional. If you have family with you, read it together. Pray together. Encourage one another. Ask your own heart the hard, searching questions. We each need to be strengthened in the faith and perhaps a little "help" like this preparatory devotional is just what we need.

The structure of these daily devotionals is simple. Read, reflect, and pray. Joy awaits us as we come to know our God and ourselves better in preparing to come to His table!

In this installment of the preparatory devotional, we look carefully at true repentance as a requirement of table fellowship.

"God will surely receive at the table of His Son all who truly repent of their sins, believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior, and desire to do His will. All those, however, who do not repent, who do not put their trust in the Lord Jesus, and who have no desire to lead a godly life, are warned, according to the command of God, to keep themselves from the holy sacrament."

~Preparatory Exhortation, paragraph 5

Monday

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

~~ **Colossians 3.1, 2**

Preparatory is a week dedicated to ‘mind-setting.’ What? What is mind-setting? Our NIV bible version here combines two parts of the body – heart and mind – to express a singular thought in the original Greek which we might translate like this....”be entirely focused.” We need to have tunnel vision this week of preparatory and what we are focused on is not the buck of deer hunting season or the tom of the turkey shoot. Our target is true repentance. However, to have true repentance as our target we must be thoroughly convinced of something that is of vital significance – we live as spiritual beings.

The wording of the Apostle here – *“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ...”* is a conclusion. Paul is ready to move to application based on a conclusion – those to whom he writes are spiritually alive in Jesus Christ. They have been born again. Such persons are keenly aware that they are ‘spiritual beings.’ The physical world is not all there is. We live in a world that is both physical and spiritual. Angels and demons are just as real as Doves and Komodo Dragons. Once we believe that we live a spiritual existence, repentance becomes an incredibly important part of life.

The preparatory practice of historically Reformed congregations surely believes repentance to be incredibly important. Listen again to these words, “God will surely receive at the table of His Son all who truly repent of their sins...” What does that say about all who do not repent?

Reflect: Christ is seated above, and on such spiritual realities we must set our minds. Such spiritual ‘mind-setting’ includes contemplating the need for true repentance.

Pray: Ask the Lord to give you a keen awareness of living as a spiritual being, in a spiritual world. Pray that you would intentionally set your mind on spiritual matters this week of preparatory.

Tuesday

“For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, Who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

~~ **Colossians 3.3, 4**

We usually define the word ‘preparatory’ to be “making ready for the celebration of the Lord’s supper.” Making ready includes readings, meditation, consideration and choice, and finally actions based on those choices. For example, this series of preparatory devotionals has, as a main goal, to have us truly repenting. However, these verses from Colossians bring a different definition of ‘preparatory’ to our attention. God the Holy Spirit directs Paul to write about being prepared for the appearance of Jesus Christ. We should be prepared for His arrival. In fact, in this particular place Paul simply states that we are prepared and when Christ appears we shall appear with Him.

What is the point of pondering now the certainty of appearing with Jesus Christ in glory? What benefit is there in stating now that we are already prepared to be with the Lord in glory? The reason for making a big deal of this fact now is that it convinces us that we are spiritual beings! Wait, this again – I thought we dealt with this yesterday? Yes, but the text presses us to take another serious look at the fact that we live as spiritual beings. Your “life” (verse 3) is already hidden with Christ in God. You are a not just an earthly person, you are a heavenly person right now. Paul makes this same truth clear at Ephesians 2.6, *“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus...”*.

This truth of our spiritual existence is significant for what we will deal with the rest of this week of preparatory – the need for true repentance.

Reflect: Know that you are a spiritual being who will appear with Christ in glory at the moment of His second coming. Take care to truly repent of all your sins, humbling yourself in His sight.

Pray: Ask the Lord to awaken in you a conviction that you are a spiritual being and that your earthly choices have heavenly consequences.

Wednesday

"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these the wrath of God is coming."

~~**Colossians 3.5, 6**

It must be clear to each of us that the morals of the world today constitute the "old" definition of immorality. People are involved in practices too sexually grotesque to even be mentioned in this preparatory devotional. The most we can say is that perversion has reached levels not seen since the days of the ancient world. With our current medical abilities new lows in degenerate practices are regularly being set.

God is not surprised about any of this, including about how wide spread this vile behavior will be. But He tells Christians to put to death every temptation to such practices as they come before us. All of this debauchery is part of our "earthly nature" and is contrary to our spiritual existence. We are commanded to put these things to death. This is the language of repentance and mortification. To repent is the first step of mortification.

Since our preparatory form is not shy about using the language of repentance, we should be honest in addressing it. Repentance is biblical and true believers do repent. What is repentance? Repentance begins with a conviction that I have sinned. Take for example the gross practices mentioned here in Colossians – these are sins. If we are committing any of these actions, we must say we are sinning in these ways. Saying, "I sinned" is a basic part of repentance. If we say we have sinned, we are admitting what God already knows. In what ways have you sinned today, this week? Admit – confess those sins and you are on the way to biblical repentance. Confessing sins is step one to putting sins to death by way of true repentance. Begin today!

Reflect: What God calls sinful in the Bible must be put to death by His people, Christians. Confession of sins is step one of repentance, and repentance is key in putting sin to death in your life.

Pray: Ask God to help you confess your sins honestly this week.

Thursday

"You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now..."
~~**Colossians 3.7, 8a**

The above section from Colossians well captures what we are after in this preparatory devotional. Repentance most generally and broadly defined has a before and after. You were doing this but now, because of repentance you are no longer doing it. As the text says, *"You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now..."* The illustrations of the before and after could be as varied as the history of sin in the human race. You were stealing candy from the store in the life you once lived, but now you no longer steal. You were cheating on tests and exams in school, but now you are not cheating any more. You were getting upset and envious that she seemed to have such poise and grace in how she carried herself while you felt that you were clunky and could never do anything well. Now you have repented of coveting her "perfection" and are content with how the Lord made you. You used to get angry easily and loose your temper a lot. Now you have repented of your temper and rage and are seeking counsel to keep your anger in check. Thousands of examples like these could be made.

Now these are rather specific examples, but they (hopefully) make the principle plain and clear. Repentance includes understanding that a behavior is sinful, confessing that behavior to the Lord as sinful, and asking the Lord to help you stop and correct that behavior. In many cases, repentance could include restitution – like with the example of stealing candy – or reconciliation with a person you have sinned against, but for now we want to ask the simple question: Am I repenting?

"God will surely receive at the table of His Son all who truly repent of their sins." What is it about you that should be a "I used to live that way, but I have repented" behavior or habit? Begin repenting now.

Reflect: There is no path around true repentance in the real Christian life. Christians can not live like there has been no change in them. Repentance is turning away from sin and walking the other way.

Pray: Ask the Lord to not let up in bringing grief and guilt into your conscience about sinful actions until you do repent of these sins.

Friday

"But now you must rid yourself of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all."

~~ **Colossians 3.8-11**

"Let each one, then, examine his life and, considering his own sin and the wrath of God on it, be sure that he humbles himself in repentance before God." (Preparatory Exhortation)

Preparatory is self-examination. We ought to be asking, "do I see myself as God sees me?" In the devotional this week that means asking if we see our sins through God's eyes. Is there unrepented anger in my life? Am I holding grudges and ill will toward other people? Do I regularly curse and swear? As you read these words you know your sin. Your sin may not be anger or malice or swearing but you do know what your sin is. Are you admitting that behavior, that action or reaction to be sinful? As you confess that sin be ready to move immediately to the next step – repentance.

We sketched this out a bit in the devotional yesterday, but repentance is a decision to stop walking in a certain, sinful direction and to turn around and walk in the opposite direction. Repentance is that change of direction in our heart. We stop the sinful behavior and kill it off. We 'rid ourselves' of that sinful action, making it to be no longer a part of our manner of living. Now we want all our actions and behaviors to be the 'new self' where all is Christ, and He is honored by all we do. True repentance is absolutely required for we sin every day. Do you repent?

Reflect: Self examination has revealed sinful actions welling up from our heart, and the Lord sees them. We repent of our sins, wanting our life to bring glory to God every day.

Pray: Ask the Lord to help you truly repent of every sin.

Saturday

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

~~ **Colossians 3.12, 13**

It is well worth noting that the Word from God through Paul which we have been studying this week was written to the elect. God's chosen people need to put repentance into practice. Another way of saying that is there is no such thing as the "frozen chosen." God's elect saints have hearts warmed by Christ's grace and kindness and they are hot on the trail of their sins so that they might repent of all their sins. We will repent.

We need to forgive one another – which means we sin against one another. Since it is true that we sin against one another how much more is it the case that we sin against God. Our knowledge of our sinning against God must work in us the action of repentance. Have you learned that basic principle this week? Are you repenting?

What sins have you repented of since taking up this preparatory devotional on Monday? Could you name some today? Have you merely learned about true repentance as a way to make you feel okay about coming to the Lord's supper tomorrow, or have you actually put this teaching into practice by repenting from an actual sin? Which sin have you repented of this week?

"Let each one, then, examine his life and considering his own sin and the wrath of God on it, be sure that he humbles himself in repentance before God." "God will surely receive at the table of His Son all who truly repent of their sins..." Repent believing that Christ will forgive.

Reflect: Elect saints still on earth have need of regular repentance and the forgiveness of their sins. Repent believing that Christ will forgive.

Pray: Ask our gracious God that we will take Him at His Word and repent of all our sins without making excuses. God will hear and forgive.