

Broomfield



# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## From Ashes to Glory Part 3

Years ago a Hindu society sought to take everything positive in Christianity without compromising its Hinduism. Amazingly they started with the Westminster Shorter Catechism. And when they came to question #87, “What is repentance unto life?” They accepted the definition as-is with one modification. Can you pick it out?

This is what they affirmed:

“Repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God, doth with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.”

Did you notice what they left out?

They left out the most important part, “...in Christ!” The Westminster Shorter Catechism states this:

“Repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ...”

By leaving this little phrase out they completely changed the definition. Without Christ mourning is simply worldly sorrow. And turning from a particular sin is just simply the rearranging of one's priorities. And any intention to “serve God” apart from Christ is moralism.

In fact, the people of our passage could vouch for that. They spent forty long years under the discipline of the Lord.<sup>1</sup> During which time they knew grief, sorrow, pain, and the longing for God's salvation. But all of this was void of Christ, and so all of it was void of any real change... until our passage!

In our text, God's people turn from their sin unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.

And this raises these questions: What's to account for this change of heart? What brought about their Spiritual Renewal?

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Judges 13:1

## Repentance

The answer to these questions lies in the second element of spiritual renewal, repentance.

1 Samuel 7:3, “**And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts**, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.”

In essence what Samuel is calling for here is repentance. In its most essential form, repentance involves a returning to the Lord from sin. Thus Samuel says, “Return!” There is much that can be said and will be said about this appeal; nevertheless, we must see that Samuel is calling for nothing less than repentance on the part of the people of God.

And yet, what does this mean? What are the elements of genuine repentance?

*Repentance* is a word packed with implications. And this is why repentance is so hotly debated today.<sup>2</sup> In fact Paul makes the distinction between genuine repentance and worldly sorrow.<sup>3</sup> In other words, it is possible as Christians to be cut to the quick and burdened for the Lord and yet in the end to have engaged in nothing more than worldly sorrow!

### The Elements of Repentance

So what is repentance? What does it involve? How does it differ from worldly sorrow?

The rest of this passage answers these questions as Samuel explains what he means by “return to the Lord with all your heart.”

1 Samuel 7:3, “**And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only**: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.”

Samuel outlines the three steps in repentance.

1. Remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and
2. Direct your hearts to the Lord and
3. Serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines

Their spiritual discipline will be over<sup>4</sup> when they follow these three elements to true repentance. It involves

1. A turning from something.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, is repentance simply a change in one's mind? Or does it involve activity or action on the part of the individual? This is one of the key issues involved in the “Lordship Salvation” debate which raged between Zane Hodges and John MacArthur years back.

<sup>3</sup> Compare 2 Corinthians 7:9-10

<sup>4</sup> Compare Judges 13:1

2. A turning to something else.
3. And a longing for service.

Now we will examine these elements closer.

## A Turning From

First of all notice that it involves a turning from something. “Remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you” (1 Samuel 7:3c). At first glance, this is rather shocking — at least it was for me when I first read such passages years ago. Throughout Scripture we read accounts where God's people have been delivered so greatly, wonderfully, and absolutely. We also read how God has demonstrated His constant love, devotion, care, and intention for His people. And yet, in the midst of some of the most profound redemptive acts this world has ever seen, God's people can be found holding on to false gods — IDOLS!

For example, after Jacob walked with God for more than fourteen years, he instructed his household this way:

Genesis 35:2, “Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments.”

This seems so incomprehensible to me. Jacob has walked with God for over fourteen years. And here we read that he is still dwelling with household idols!

How could he do this?

And yet Jacob was not alone. God's people under Joshua have enjoyed the best of redemption- taking the promised land, distributing it amongst themselves, living and thriving in the land. Now at the end of Joshua's life, this is what he exhorted them this way:

Joshua 24:23, “Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel.”

Again, we have this shocking pronouncement. And yet in the context of redemptive history, this appears to be quite normative. Don't miss it! We read about false gods and idols during the time of Moses,<sup>5</sup> the time of Judges,<sup>6</sup> the Kingdom years,<sup>7</sup> and before the final exile.<sup>8</sup>

Why was there such a devotion to images, idols, and icons throughout Israel's history? Why the “foreign gods?”

In a word brothers and sisters, security! The predominant religious mind-set of the ancient Near East is that geographical regions housed local gods. For example, there were the mountain gods, desert gods, sea gods, Asian gods, Greek gods, and Roman gods. And people pretty much believed that these gods ruled over the local region — sort of like governors in a political kingdom.

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<sup>5</sup> Compare Deuteronomy 32:15-18

<sup>6</sup> Compare Judges 10:16

<sup>7</sup> Compare 2 Chronicles 33:15

<sup>8</sup> Compare Jeremiah 5:19

Now to be sure there was overlap — just as in civil government where you have mayors, territorial governors, regional legates, and ultimately a king. Accordingly it was rather tricky to determine if your local god was bound to your city or if he/she was more powerful — and in fact ruled a region or an empire.

So the question was, “Is Yahweh the only true God? Might there be others? And if others, how powerful really is God? AND ARE YOU WILLING TO TAKE THE CHANCE THAT YAHWEH IS ONLY A REGIONAL DEITY?”

Many Israelites through redemptive history weren't willing to take that chance. So they worshipped God, but also placated the local deities of their region. And this is why we read of the constant struggle that God's people had with the worship and possession of “foreign gods” — specifically in our text — the Ashtaroth.

Now, Ashtaroth was the chief female deity in Canaanite religion. As the goddess of love, fertility, and war, horrible things were perpetrated in the name of this goddess at the various Canaanite altars which were scattered throughout Palestine. In fact, Ashtaroth's counterpart in other nations was Ishtar, among the Babylonians; Aphrodite, among the Greeks; and Venus, among the Romans.

We also read of Baal. He is referenced in verse 4, and he was a problem for the sons of Israel. Baal was the chief male deity in Canaanite religion. He was the son of Dagon and believed to be the god of lightening — and so the god of rain and fertility. As the chief god of the Philistines, he also was the god of war.

Now it was in this context that Samuel said, “Remove the foreign gods from among you! You want to serve God; you must take the risk and rely upon nothing else!”

Accordingly do you see the first element of true repentance?

It is NOT so much the turning from a sin-action, BUT the turning from one's allegiance to a particular sin, world view, or way of life. And this is important.

When “repentance” is thought of simply as turning from a sin-action; it is easily affected apart from Christ. For the sake of being good, anyone of us could turn from a bad habit, bad company, and the like. People do this all the time. It is called turning over a new leaf. But this is not Biblical repentance.

Repentance may involve the turning from a bad habit. But more fundamentally it involves the turning from an allegiance or dependence upon anything other than God. And so genuine repentance — the repentance that leads to spiritual renewal/life — involves first the turning from one's allegiance to self, sin, pleasure, power, and the like.

## **A Turning Toward**

Secondly, it includes a turning toward.

1 Samuel 7:3b, “Return unto the LORD with all your hearts.”

Notice that Samuel doesn't focus on external acts — not yet. Rather, he focuses on the people of God's allegiance to the Lord. “Return unto the LORD” involves not only saying that you love Christ or that you

want to serve Him. It ALSO means that you intend to rely upon Him alone for your salvation.

In other words one can no longer depend upon foreign gods for protection. No longer can one's dependence be bifurcated. On the one hand you serve the Lord and on the other hand you serve Baal or the Ashtaroath. This shows one's distrust of worshipping the true God because he is also pacifying a local deity just in case.

Repentance involves a whole-hearted, single-minded trust in the goodness, sovereignty, righteousness, and salvation of God!

That, brothers and sisters is what repentance is all about.

## **A Longing to Serve**

And yet there is one more element, a longing to serve your new allegiance.

1 Samuel 7:3d, "And prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve<sup>9</sup> him only."

With this exhortation we enter into the realm of action! The word used here to denote service is a broad term in the Hebrew. It can denote the process of creating and building,<sup>10</sup> the obedience that ought to be rendered to an individual or deity,<sup>11</sup> and the actual activity of worship and devotion (at least in root form).<sup>12</sup> However what stands out about this word is that it generally references all of the things that are done in one's life.<sup>13</sup> For example, "service" could be used in reference to eating, drinking, going, coming, lying down, rising up, walking, talking, living and dying.

Accordingly, when it comes to the "service" of repentance, it is NOT just on Sunday that you see an impact. This word implies that it will have an impact on all of life (it will be "as we go")! Indeed!

Repentance begins with a turning from one's allegiance to or dependence upon self, sin, pleasure, or anything else in this world. And it ends in a commitment to serve the Lord at every moment and in every thing that pertains to one's life or death. In other words, we are talking about identity here.

Let me ask you a very important question, "What are you?"

This is a common question asked at dinner parties and social gatherings. Now what is meant by this is, "What do you do?"

And so typical answers are things like these:

- I'm a housewife.
- I'm a lawyer.
- I'm a school teacher.

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<sup>9</sup> עבד 'abad

<sup>10</sup> Compare Daniel 3:1, 15; 5:1

<sup>11</sup> Compare Ezra 7:26

<sup>12</sup> Compare Ezra 4:24, 5:8, 6:7

<sup>13</sup> Compare Ezra 4:22; 6:8, 12, 13; 7:18; Daniel 4:35; 6:10, 22

- I'm a business man.
- I'm a policeman.

Family of God, I beg to differ. Since when are you constituted by what you do? If you eat apples, does that make you a horse? And yet we've allowed ourselves today to be defined by what we do such that if what we do isn't deemed significant by our world, we feel worthless. And if what we do is viewed as important, we feel significant.

We must oppose this misunderstanding. For what we are is what God has made us in Christ — **WE ARE SERVANTS OF THE LIVING GOD!**

From all of this we must see that Biblical repentance involves a change of one's identity from being a servant of one's work, a servant of one's spouse, a servant of public opinion, a servant of sin, and a servant of self, to being a servant of the living God!

So what is the second element of Spiritual Renewal?

It is a shifting of one's allegiance from self, pleasure, sin, Satan, and public opinion to God such that our identity is re-created. Through Christ we have become servants of God!

## **Talk is Cheap**

Now talk is cheap! Anyone can say, "I want to serve the Lord. I'm tired of living this way." Many drunkards have said this standing over their drink in a bar last night. But unless we actually turn in our allegiance to God and become His servants our good intentions are worthless!

In fact this is what distinguishes worldly sorrow from genuine repentance. Worldly sorrow says I am tired of living this way. I'm sorry I got caught. I wish things were different. Biblical repentance says, "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned; I turn now to Thee. What would you have me to do?"

## **The Consummation of Repentance**

And so notice the consummation of repentance.

1 Samuel 7:4, "Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only."

This is spiritual renewal! God's people spent forty years serving the Ashtaroth, Baals, Philistines, and ultimately themselves! And yet in a moment, they abandoned this way of life — this devotion to self — to serve the living God.

You say, "Such a transformation! What's to account for it?"

The answer is the working of God by which He broke His people<sup>14</sup> and thereby affected a change in their allegiance from self unto God. Again I refer you to John Darby's words:

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<sup>14</sup> Compare last weeks sermon on 1 Samuel 7:2

“To be hungry is not enough; I must be really starving to know what is in God's heart toward me. When the prodigal son was hungry, he went to feed on the husks, but when he was starving, he turned to his father.”<sup>15</sup>

Family of God let me ask you these questions:

- Are you tired of your sin — or are you just tired of feeling guilty?
- Are you tired of serving the Ashtaroth and the Baals — or are you just tired of the hangover the next morning?
- Are you tired of trampling underfoot the cross of Christ — or are you just tired of the failure?

You will never know spiritual renewal so long as your repentance is in order to get a clear conscience, an easier life, a clean record, or relief from guilt. The focus of repentance is not an element of getting, but the whole-hearted giving of oneself unto the Lord!

Don't miss the important qualification that Samuel gives in this text.

1 Samuel 7:3, “And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, **If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts**, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.”

“With all your heart” is placed in the emphatic position in the Hebrew. Samuel had watched God's people express phony repentance before — no doubt on many occasions. But this time it must be different! Thus, the prophet exhorted the people that their repentance must come from their heart! They must render themselves unto the Lord! In other words, no more double-heartedness! They must serve the Lord with integrity!

## False Repentance

Oh family of God, may we heed this exhortation.

Bunyan has a character in *Pilgrim's Progress*, a Mr. Presumption, who went to the cross and left it with the intention of committing the same sin which brought him to the cross in the first place. Dante has a reprobate who, all the time he was repenting, had his eye on his next opportunity. Bunyan and Dante could speak as they did because such people are commonplace in the church.

- How many Israelites regretted the loss of the Ark — but then went home to their foreign god?
- How many people of God missed the Ark of the Covenant in their worship and even spoke the same in public — only to continue to serve themselves in their daily living?
- How many Christians at this time in history wept and lamented the pitiful state of God's people — and yet remained a servant of their sin for forty years?

It is not the tears we cry. Neither is it the conviction that we feel. It is not the how much regret there is in our hearts. It is the willful abandonment of our sin on account of Christ AND the giving of our self unto God! When this occurred in the life of Israel, that is when they knew relief!

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in MacArthur's New Testament Commentary Series, *Matthew 1-7*, pages 181-182.

Family of God we must search our hearts this day.

- Are you hungry for the Lord? You must be starving!
- Do you want freedom from a particular sin?

You must want to be a servant of Christ! Until you starve for Christ and long to serve Him regardless of the cost, the desert will continue to be your home.

Now, this doesn't mean that you work your heart into a frenzy until you feel like you could want only Christ. It means that we get real and honest with ourselves and determine if we are willing to give up our household idols. Christ must truly be all that we want.

You say, "My heart is deceitful above all else and desperately sick<sup>16</sup> and how can I know what I genuinely want?"

Most likely you won't. But this is the good news. God didn't give up on His people when they sought Him with a divided heart. No! He continued to love, cherish, protect, and discipline them.

You know how I leave a text like this?

I leave it on my knees with this prayer:

Psalm 139:23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Family of God let us this day confess our sin to the Lord and pour our hearts out before Him. Let us confess our unholy allegiances, our vile alliance with this world, and our commitment to self. Let us turn unto God as the sole ground of our justification. Let us render to Him that which is His due. Let us serve Him alone. And so let us enjoy a Renewal in our Walks with Christ.

You say, "I want to, but my heart even now is cold!"

Then begin this morning simply by asking the Lord to break you and to grant you the gift of repentance. Lancelot Andrewes wrote in a private meditation these words:<sup>17</sup>

"I need more grief, O God; I plainly need it. I can sin much, but I cannot correspondingly repent. O Lord, give me a molten heart. Give me tears; give me a fountain of tears. Give me the grace of tears. Drop down, ye heavens, and bedew the dryness of my heart. Give me, O Lord, this saving grace. No grace of all the graces were more welcome to me. If I may not water my couch with my tears, nor wash thy feet with my tears, at least give me one or two little tears that Thou mayest put into thy bottle and write in Thy book!"<sup>18</sup>

May God give us the grace to seek for spiritual renewal on our knees!

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<sup>16</sup> Compare Jeremiah 17:9

<sup>17</sup> You will find this quote in last week's notes and now in today's; on account of time, I wasn't able to use it last week during the sermon.

<sup>18</sup> From his *Private Devotions*, pages 172-174, summarized in Whyte, *Bunyan Characters*, iii, page 196.



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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on February 26, 2006. Greg is the Preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.