

## Is Repentance A Gift?

Date: 2020-06-14

Text: 2 Timothy 2:19-26

INTRO: Recently, I was pondering if repentance is a gift. So turn to 2 Timothy 2. It was because I was rerunning things through my mind, seeing if there was justification for the view that unless God grants repentance to a person he cannot be saved. It is viewed by Calvinists that repentance and faith are gifts, and God gives these gifts only to the elect. The rest can't be saved. They are the non-elect.

This message is not about Calvinism, but I read in Onenewsnow, a Christian apologist, Dr. Alex MacFarland, says, "[Over the last 15 years or so] they've really released an army of militant, young hyper-Calvinists who have split churches [and who have] at best killed evangelism and missions to a large degree" end quote. MacFarland blames this movement on Bible schools.

<https://onenewsnow.com/church/2020/06/11/so-baptist-pastor-3-isms-are-eroding-my-denomination>

Here is the question for the morning: Does man have the ability to believe and to repent? Or must God give one the gift of faith and the gift of repentance? Let me say first of faith, that when it is spoken of as a gift, it is always a gift to Christians to serve the church, not to non-believers to get saved. I won't take time for that since it is not my subject.

But repentance is a little harder to determine. Because of the size of this subject, I will only deal with it as far as 2 Timothy 2:24-26 is concerned. It says:

*24 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient,*

*25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,*

*26 and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.*

Verse 25 says, "...if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth..." Would you not say that it seems quite clear from this verse that God may or may not grant

repentance? And we know if that is the case, a person to whom God will not grant repentance cannot repent.

Well this is the verse that was on my mind that morning. And I began to research it once more and I found some very instructive things for me, as a pastor, and I think they will be instructive to you as well. After I had spent much time in studying this verse, I decided to put it into message form.

In Christianity repentance is a change of mind about sin. When one repents, that is one changes one's mind about sin, now confession of sin is in order. If I have stolen from anyone, and I repent, that means I must confess and make it right with the one from whom I stole. Repentance and being forgiven is free, and thus can be said to be a gift. It is something that is given or granted. So Scripture says that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

#### I. THE CONTEXT

We begin by looking at the context of our verses in chapter 2 of 2 Timothy. We won't take time to read verses 1-10, but the Apostle is speaking to a pastor, young Timothy, and encouraging him to be strong like one has to be when in battle or competing in Olympics. Here we get an idea of the strength it takes to be faithful in ministry.

Paul then goes on in verse 11 and we'll pick it up there. He says:

*11 This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him.*

*12 If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.*

*13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.*

If we are truly Christians, we have died with Christ and we shall also live with Him. If we endure, like a soldier or one competing in athletics, we will also reign with Christ. That is the millennial reign. But, if we deny Christ, He will deny us. There is no such thing as once saved always saved. There are those who do not endure, that is quite

obvious in life But, if we are faithless, God remains faithful. His faithfulness continues though we deny Him. But if we deny Him, now He will also deny us. This holds true for all Christians and it is a sincere warning.

So Paul goes on like this:

*14 Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers.*

Clearly, in Timothy's church they had those who caused problems and strove about words to no profit. (See 1 Timothy 6:1-5).

We go on:

*15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

*16 But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.*

Whatever was going on among them was talk that would only ever increase to more ungodliness. The reason this was happening is now further explained in verses 17-18:

*17 And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort,*

*18 who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.*

Where the truth is preached there will always be those who cause trouble. Verse 19:

*19 Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."*

Commentators seem to agree that Paul is here referring to the Church. Albert Barnes says: "The seal here is one that was affixed to the foundation, and seems to refer to some inscription on the foundation-stone which always remained

there, and which denoted the character and design of the edifice. The allusion is to the custom, in rearing an edifice, of inscribing the name of the builder and the design of the edifice on the corner-stone... So the church of Christ is a budding (sic., building) reared by the hands of God. Its foundation has been firmly and securely laid, and on that foundation there is an inscription always remaining, which determines the character of the edifice."

The first seal is that the Lord knows those who truly belong to Him. The second is that those who truly belong to God depart from iniquity. Those are the human and divine seals. What is implied is that there are those who profess to be believers but they may not be part of the Church.

So he goes on in verse 20:

*20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor.*

Just like in the Universal Church, in a great house, some magnificent mansion, there are vessels of gold and silver, and others of wood and clay. Some are for honor, and some for dishonor. Commentators seem to agree that Paul is speaking about the Church here. And he points out that there is a huge difference between the literal, physical, vessels in some rich man's home and all the people who profess to be believers in the church. So Paul says further:

*21 Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.*

The vessels to dishonor are in need of cleansing, and to become a sanctified vessel to honor. So Timothy, besides being given the responsibility to remind his people about these things, is told further to do this:

*22 Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*

*23 But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.*

He is to flee youthful lusts, or desires. It is evident that this church, like most churches, had their share of internal problems. Then Paul encourages him to pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with all those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. You see, Paul is very careful to qualify those with whom Timothy is to pursue these good things. It is with all those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. There are people in the church with whom it is impossible to do that.

Now who are these people who strive about words to no profit, and ruin some who follow them (v. 14)? Who are those who cause profane and idle babblings that increase to more ungodliness (v. 16)? Who are those whose message spreads like a cancer? Who are those who do not depart from iniquity and overthrow the faith of some? Who are those who are vessels to dishonor? Who are these that lead others into foolish and ignorant disputes that generate strife?

It seems to me they are professing Christians who have some claims for themselves and who have enough appearance of being right that they draw others into their strife. Now considering those, one would say, "Well, they would be easy to spot. Surely no pastor should put up with people like that." Oh no, it's not like that at all. It is amazing how honest and upright people with hidden agendas can appear. But they are vessels to dishonor and need correction in order that they might be vessels to honor.

## II. THE TEXT

### A. The Corrector (24-25a)

So let us consider our text. This message is primarily an exposition of verses 25b-26. I will only very briefly look at verses 24-25a and spend the bulk of our time on 25b-26. In 24-25a we have Paul's instruction on how Timothy is to correct the problems he has in mind in this chapter.

24 *And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient,*

25 *in humility correcting those who are in opposition,*

The servant of the Lord must not quarrel. He is to be gentle and able to teach in such situations and be patient. Verse 25 then says he is to correct such people as mentioned in the context in humility. I think the KJV translation, to correct in meekness, is more accurate here than in humility.

The ones to be corrected are described here as those who are in opposition. This speaks of those needing correction and this is where we begin the major part of this message.

B. The Corrected (25b-26)

1. The corrected identified

So, our first task is identifying those in need of correction. In the previous verses they were those who led in disputes about words (v. 14); had profane and idle babblings (v. 16); caused doctrinal division and overthrew the faith of some (v. 18), were vessels of wood and clay and needed cleansing and sanctification (vv. 20-21), and caused foolish and ignorant disputes (v. 23).

Now the NKJV identifies those who need correction as, "...those who are in opposition..." The KJV identifies those needing correction as, "...those that oppose themselves..." An accurate translation of this word is most crucial here, and I believe the KJV is right.

In the original, the words translated, "those who are in opposition," or "those who oppose themselves is a verbal." Verbs have voice. In our English we have two voices for a verb or verbal. They are either active or passive. Let me explain those. When I say, "I hit the ball", the subject is doing the acting and the verb is then active.

I, the subject, did the action. If I say, "The ball hit me", now the verb is passive. I didn't act. I was acted upon. I was hit by the ball.

In the original language of the NT there are three voices. There is the active and the passive, what is called the middle voice. For example, if I say, "I hit myself with the ball" this is a middle voice. I did the action but I did it to myself.

Now what is most instructive in our verse, is that the verbal is a middle voice and translated literally it would read, "...correcting the opposing themselves ones." The KJV correctly translates this as, "...instructing those that oppose themselves..."

I think because it seems so awkward to word this phrase like this, all translations but the KJV do not translate the middle voice here. If the middle voice is allowed to stand, how does one oppose oneself?

Let me share some ways one can oppose himself. Let us say I have done something to another I should not do. I am convicted about what I have done but I do not want to acknowledge it was wrong. Maybe others also tell me I should not have done it and they agree with what my convictions are telling me. But I do not want to acknowledge I did wrong. So I defend myself. I come up with all kinds of arguments. And the more this thing comes up, the more I defend myself. And who am I standing in opposition to? Myself! I feel I may well be wrong but I do not want to deal with it if I am. And now, with all I have said and argued and with how difficult such a confession would be, I stand in opposition to myself.

Let me give another case. Maybe I have taken a stand on some issue and it is shown that I may be

wrong. Maybe I have argued for something, and now it is starting to make sense and I realize I might be wrong. Maybe I am living in something that is not right, and I am questioned about it. I am uncomfortable with it, and even more so when I am confronted and I start to make arguments for my position. And the more I fight this thing the bigger my trap becomes, and it could rightly be said I am standing in opposition to myself.

Let me give another case. Maybe I am upset at someone. Another comes along and feeds my resentment against this person. Maybe it begins to grow and still others feed my resentment towards this person. And finally it leads to some wrongdoing, but now I must defend my wrongdoing. And now I am trapped in what I have done, and inwardly I am in opposition to myself. And now I do not want to face up to the truth.

Or maybe I have done something and my conscience smites me. But because of what I have said or argued, now I can't humble myself to say I was wrong. And I dig my hole deeper and deeper. Others come along and support me and my hole gets even deeper.

Take our context. Maybe it has been some striving about words (verse 14). Or maybe it is the foolish and ignorant disputes of verse 23. And I have entered such things and now I find I might be wrong. Now I will do everything to justify what I have said or done.

Maybe I have argued some doctrine, like verses 17-18. Or maybe I am trying to correct someone who has fallen into wrong teaching. Some of our folk have had opportunity to converse with some JW's recently. When something is pointed out to them, and it seems it might be true, they will immediately dig up everything against what you



have said they can. It is this very trap many such people are in.

And now, maybe on the inside of those caught in such a predicament, there is a voice that cautions and nudges, but every opposition is raised within against having to acknowledge one is wrong. Maybe pride alone keeps me trapped, and I am standing in opposition to myself. If I find myself in such a predicament, how I wish I could justify myself enough that I am fully satisfied within, but something is not right, and I am standing in opposition to myself and there is no true peace within.

And when we are the one seeking to correct such a person, it may be our child, our spouse, our friend, or it may be the pastor as in our context; here is the key to the one doing the correcting:

*24 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, 25 in humility (better, meekness) correcting those who are in opposition,*

Meekness is controlled power. The one correcting is in the right, and this requires teaching in meekness and gentleness and patience. Oh how many times I have failed on this. Described here is probably the only way such arguments can be won.

Well, the first key to understanding this passage is the middle voice, correcting those who stand in opposition to themselves. But there is another key. We go on then in verse 25:

*25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance,*

We have looked the ones to be corrected. They are those who are in opposition to themselves. The text now further says, "...if God perhaps will

grant them repentance." This conditional clause is why I initially restudied this verse. Is repentance dependent upon whether God gives it or is repentance a responsibility that we can choose to do or to not do? This verse seems to teach it depends on whether God decides to grant repentance or not.

Let me read to you the most enlightening comment I have read anywhere regarding the word translated "if...perhaps" in the NKJV and "if peradventure" KJV. The ESV says, "God may perhaps grant them repentance." Here is the quote by Albert Barnes. He says of this word, "If perhaps", "It is not used elsewhere in the New Testament in the sense which our translators, and all the critics, so far as I have examined, give to it here – as implying a hope that God would give them repentance, etc. But I may be permitted to suggest another interpretation, which will accord with the uniform meaning of the word in the New Testament, and which will refer the matter to those who had embraced the error, and not to God. It is this: 'In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves... lest – μηποτε – God should give them repentance, and they should recover themselves out of the snare of the devil,' etc. That is, they put themselves in this posture of opposition so that they shall not be brought to repentance, and recover themselves," end quote.

The original word *meepote* occurs 25 times in the NT. The KJV has translated it as: lest 12 times, lest at any time 7 times. To translate as "lest" here is the most consistent use of this word and it is never elsewhere translated as "if perhaps" or "peradventure."

Turn to the book of Matthew for a few examples of this word used elsewhere. We want to look at the

first three occurrences of this word as it appears in the NT:

*Matthew 4:6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest <3379> you dash your foot against a stone.'"*

*Matthew 5:25 "Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest <3379> your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.*

*Matthew 7:6 "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest <3379> they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.*

Let me now give verse 25 with a translation giving the meaning of these two words we have looked at:

*25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition to themselves, lest God should grant them repentance,*

That is a precise translation. Now, the verb translated "will grant" NKJV, or "will give" is subjunctive and is correctly translated, "...lest God should give..." Now why do these people stand in opposition to themselves? Why do they continue in arguments in which they may well sense they are wrong? Because once they would acknowledge the truth of the matter, now God could grant them repentance, and repentance is what they are fighting!

Now there is a sense in which repentance is a gift. But whether I get the gift or not is up to me, not God. It is not a gift God may or may not give. It is a gift He will give when I learn the truth and acknowledge my wrong. The cleansing and

forgiveness granted by repentance is free. It cannot be bought or worked for. It is always free, but it requires acknowledgement or confession. Here are those difficult words, "I was wrong. What I said was a lie."

## 2. The purpose of correcting

Let us now go on in our passage. There is yet another difficulty to answer. It is this: Do the words, "...so that they may know the truth..." and the following words attach to the verb "are" in the clause, "Those who are in opposition"? Or do they attach to the verbal word, "correcting"?

If it connects to the verb "are" it would read like this: "...if God perhaps will grant them repentance so that they may know the truth..." etc. The problem is that God does not grant repentance in order for them to know the truth. They need to know the truth in order to come to repentance. So if we connect it to the verbal *correcting*, it would read like this: "...in meekness correcting those who oppose themselves so that they may know the truth..." etc... The correcting is done in order to bring them to the truth.

Here is the point: The one who needs correction does not repent in order that he may know the truth. The one who corrects, does so, in order that the one who needs correction may know the truth. True, biblical repentance needs to be based on truth. Those who oppose themselves do so to avoid the truth, because acknowledgment of the truth would require repentance.

Now, the word "to know" is *epignosis*. The idea is that they might come to a full knowledge or an experiential knowledge of the truth. If that should happen, then God would be able to grant them repentance. What kept them from acknowledging the truth was that they did not want to repent. If once I acknowledge what I did

or what I believe or said is wrong, now repentance may happen, and it will if I am honest.

Now we note at the root of this whole problem lies the truth. What must happen before anyone can have the true biblical faith, and truly repent, is a full knowledge of the truth. And for those in such errors as our passage gives, the pastor's task is to expose the truth to them. And when the truth is acknowledged, now repentance should take place. Therefore these folk are in opposition to themselves lest God should grant them repentance. Repentance would require an acknowledgement of that which they don't want to acknowledge.

But if they can be brought to a full knowledge of the truth, that could now cause them to repent which would cause them to come to their senses, or as the KJV puts it, recover themselves. The word is *ananeepho*. It means to become sober. It is to recover from drunkenness. To have the thinking messed up by standing in opposition to oneself lest God grant one repentance is like being mentally drunk. An acknowledgment of truth will be a recovering from a drunken stupor, mentally.

So the corrector of such persons is to correct in meekness so that they might acknowledge the truth and thus sober up mentally. And all of this is so that they may escape the snare of the devil. You see, what has happened to people like this, is that in some slippery way, through something they have said or done, the devil has been able to snare them. And now they are struggling to justify themselves when what they need is to be set free from the snare. But that will require repentance, acknowledging the truth and coming to their senses. Many would rather die in the snare and risk the hereafter.

So what happened? Well, let us read verses 20 in the context:

*20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor.*

Commentators are mostly agreed that this great house speaks of the church. There are vessels of gold and silver. But, there are also vessels of wood and clay. The gold and silver are for honor and the wood and clay for dishonor. Almost, if not every church has some of both.

If anyone is a vessel of dishonor, verse 21 now instructs such persons:

*21 Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.*

Every Christian is somewhere in the process of being sanctified. Everyone who becomes a Christian has things to be cleansed from. Every Christian needs to be sanctified in order to become a vessel of honor. And what Satan will seek to do is find someone who is a vessel of wood or clay and catch this person in a snare through pride and strife of words or teachings or anything else, as the context bears out. And when he catches them in his snare, they will become his instruments in the church to do his will.

And those who are so caught, in turn, will begin to oppose themselves because they are caught. They struggle to come free by defending themselves or gaining others to their side or by any other means they can find. And the more they dig, the deeper the hole becomes.

What has happened? Satan has snared someone in the church. He knows who to go for. And once they are caught by what they have said or done, they

have been taken captive by Satan. And why does he catch such people in the church? So that he can use them to carry out his will.

When I studied verse 25 and finally felt I understood it, I was discussing it one morning with my wife. And as we talked about those who stand in opposition to themselves and how they have this inward battle, but outwardly they argue their cause, she said something like, "Oh, that describes people who justify themselves." There is not a more precise description for those who oppose themselves. What do we do when we seek to justify ourselves? We argue ourselves into being right when something seems to be wrong or when conviction has set in and we don't want to deal with it in truth. It is amazing how capable we are of justifying ourselves.

Turn to Luke 10:25. There was a certain lawyer who wanted to be right with God but he had some baggage that needed to be taken care of. And so he came to Jesus to talk about how he might get eternal life. We begin in verse 25:

*25 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"*

*26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?"*

*27 So he answered and said, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'"*

*28 And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."*

*29 But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

Why was it this "neighbor" thing bothered him? Why did he need to justify himself before Jesus

about it? Did Jesus, by chance, seem to know what was going on inside? Here is what may have been the case. When Jesus spoke to him about loving his neighbor, a person or two, maybe more immediately came to this lawyer's mind. I suppose he had miss-treated a few clients or maybe he had overcharged some or not told the truth about someone. He was a lawyer. And now he is standing in opposition to himself and saying to himself, "Well, the guy I mistreated was not a Jew. And that other one was from a far distant town. And the one guy was a Gentile. And that other guy, well, he was a Samaritan. I wonder what Jesus means by neighbor? Could He mean these too?"

So after some thinking, wanting to justify himself he asked, "And who is my neighbor?" Maybe he is thinking, if Jesus explains what He means by "neighbor," maybe he is still OK. And so Jesus told him the parable of the good Samaritan. Do you remember how this account ends? Look at verses 36-37. Jesus said:

*36 "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"*

The three were a priest, a Levite and a Samaritan. Verse 37:

*37 And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."*

He couldn't get himself to say, "the Samaritan." We do not know what this lawyer did. But what do you suppose he might have had to do if he stopped standing in opposition to himself or justifying himself? Had he by any chance, as a lawyer testified against some filthy Samaritan? Would he need to go and confess that the Samaritan was innocent? And how much would that cost him in pride and maybe in dollars? I expect that if he acknowledged the truth and really came to his senses and wanted to escape the snare of the



devil he was caught in, repentance would have been in order. But oh, what a price, though repentance is granted freely.

Pastor Daryl gave some messages on the Steward who would be put out of his stewardship. Turn to Luke 16. Before the steward lost his job, he made a cushion for himself so that when he landed, it would not hurt as much. It all had to do with money. We'll just briefly go to the conclusion in verse 14. It says:

*14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.*

Jesus had talked about money. The Pharisees were the religious leaders, but they loved money. Now, if what Jesus had just said was true how could they be religious leaders and be lovers of money too? Jesus had just said, "You can't serve both money and God." But that is what they were doing. So it says they derided Jesus. This word means something like to turn up the nose or to sneer at, or to scoff at.

I recommend that when they heard Jesus talking about this steward, inwardly a voice said, "This is true. Yes, this is the way it is. It is not right for you to do what you are doing." But to acknowledge that this was true, would be a price they were not willing to pay. So what does someone like a Pharisee do when someone has the gall to tell them the truth about how they are living? After all, they are the spiritual leaders! Well, they derided Him. They tried to make Him look ridiculous.

Verse 15:

*15 And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your*

*hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.*

So let me put His words this way: "Let me tell you what you are doing right now. You are justifying yourselves before these people who look up to you as religious leaders. They hear what I am saying about you and you do not want to agree with what you know is right. But since the people have heard this, you have to justify yourselves in their eyes. So you belittle Me as though you are the ones who are right. But I want to tell you something. God knows your hearts. And your hearts are telling you what I said is true. The people esteem you because of your position, when what you are doing is wrong. But what they esteem is an abomination in the sight of God." Jesus had nerve. Isn't it a marvel that they did not kill Jesus sooner?

Now what was true about the lawyer was also true about these Pharisees. It is this: Satan had them in his snare. And because they were in his snare, they were doing his bidding. And the amazing thing about this snare is that anyone caught in it has a *get out of jail free* card. You can undo the snare yourself and walk away free. That freedom is granted or given. And here is how to cash in this "get out of jail free" card: Repent!

But at what price does repentance come when you have lived like the lawyer and the Pharisees in our passages? It is no wonder that in such cases and many others, one would oppose oneself, and seek to justify oneself either in oneself or before others.

Christ, having just spoken of Himself as God's stone, which they rejected, said to the chief priests and Pharisees:

*44 And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*

Their option was to fall broken in repentance on the chief corner stone which they denied; or to have it fall on them and grind them to powder (Matt. 21:44).

And every church will have vessels of wood and of clay, vessels that need to cleanse themselves in the process of sanctification. The vessels of gold and silver of our passage have been sanctified thoroughly as the perfect tense there indicates. And through thorough cleansing they become useful for the Master, prepared for every good work!

CONCL: And to conclude, what Paul has taught regarding repentance here may be found useful to us all. First, Satan seeks in the church those he can take captive to do his will in the church. He does this by catching us in a situation where we find ourselves justifying ourselves for something we have said or done. And the more we insist and try to make it seem right to ourselves or others the more stuck we get. When I went to school I had to read the story of when Brer Fox finally caught Brer Rabbit with a tar baby. Brer Rabbit got angry with the tar baby and punched the baby and got stuck in the tar. The more Brer Rabbit fought the more stuck he got.

This can happen in the home, in the church, in visiting or wherever one is together with others. When we do this we become the tool of the devil. This can happen when I do wrong to anyone else, like say, lying. The other does not know what I have done, but I start to justify myself. I am standing in opposition to myself. And if the Holy Spirit wins, I will acknowledge the truth and repent.

The key issue is the truth and acknowledging the truth. And the key to dealing with such wrongdoing is teaching with gentleness and patience and correcting in meekness. Some such matters, will require excommunication. In the context, some doctrinal errors

may spread like a cancer, like teaching that the resurrection is past (vv. 16-18).

And to our question: Is repentance a gift? Yes, but whether I receive it or not is up to me, not God. I must come to the truth and then acknowledge or confess my wrong.