

# REND YOUR HEART & NOT YOUR GARMENTS

## **TEXT: JOEL 2:12-17**

### **Introduction:**

1. The theme of Joel's prophecy is the "day of the LORD" (cf. 1:15; 2:1, 2, 11, 30, 31; 3:14-16).
2. We left off two weeks ago at Joel 2:11, where the prophet Joel says, "For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?"
3. That is an important question. Indeed, who can abide it?
4. Now the question people need to be asking is: What can a sinner do in a time like this? We see the answer in Joel 2:13 – "And rend your heart, and not your garments." This signifies genuine repentance.
5. True repentance has three elements.

### **I. CONTRITION**

### **II. CONFESSION**

### **III. CONDUCT**

#### **I. CONTRITION**

1. Contrition affects the intellect. To repent means, "to change your mind." Joel 2:12 says, "Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart..." (cf. Ezek. 18:27-32).
2. A person will not turn to God with all his heart unless he at first thinks about it. I mentioned on Sunday evening how the prodigal son "came to himself" (Luke 15:17).
3. Ezekiel 18:28 says, "Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed..."
4. And what is there to think about?
  - Think about our sinfulness.
  - Think about God's holiness.
  - Think about the judgment of God.
5. On the day of Pentecost Peter preached, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38). Peter was preaching to a large crowd of Jews. When he told them to repent, he meant they had to change their mind about who Jesus was. They had to change their thinking about the Lord.
6. Contrition not only affects the intellect; contrition also affects the will. It is not enough for a sinner to think about his sin, and to think about God's judgment. The sinner must do something about it. Like the prodigal son, he must climb out of the devil's hogpen.

7. Contrition not only affects the intellect and the will. It also affects the emotions. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:17).
8. David said, “For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.” (Ps. 51:16). In other words, if some little religious ritual was all that God required (e.g., RC “penance”), then David would gladly do it.
9. But David understood, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:17).
10. While contrition affects the emotions, contrition is more than feeling sorrow or remorse over sin. The Bible says Judas repented, i.e., he felt remorse over his terrible sin – especially over the consequences of his sin.
11. But there was no evidence of genuine contrition with Judas. In fact, he went out and hanged himself. Peter, on the other hand, “wept bitterly,” and gave ample evidence of genuine contrition and repentance.
12. Matthew 26:75 says, “And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.”
13. It is amazing the way some sinners resist repentance. We see this all the time. Consider all the politicians who get caught in sex scandals – Gov. Spitzer, Gov. McGreevey, more recently John Edwards, etc.
14. They almost seem incapable of repenting. A while back I read a good article about Pete Rose, the disgraced baseball player who finally admitted to gambling on baseball games (after 14 years of denying it) while he was managing the Cincinnati Reds.
15. Listen to what syndicated columnist George Will had to say. “Almost anyone can recover from almost anything by convincingly saying, ‘I’m sorry.’ Rose lied – and charmed the gullible – for 14 years. Now, with the clock running out on his eligibility to election by baseball writers to the Hall of Fame, he pugnaciously says: I lied but ‘I’m just not built’ to ‘act all sorry or sad or guilty’ about it. ‘Act’? Rose’s critics have said that **repentance is a necessary -- not a sufficient -- prerequisite for restoring his eligibility to the Hall of Fame.** Many, probably most, of Rose’s critics are revolted by the moral obtuseness of his **synthetic repentance.** His dwindling band of defenders responds that it is unfair to judge Rose not by what he does but by the way he does it. **Yet regarding repentance, the way you do it is what you do.**”

## II. CONFESSION

1. True repentance involves three things: contrition, confession, and conduct. We saw on Sunday evening that John's converts were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, "confessing their sins" (Mark 1:5).
2. True contrition leads the individual to confession of his sin. Confession is to admit to one's transgression, and to agree with God that one has sinned against Him.
3. Before God can forgive sin, the sinner must confess and forsake his sin. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).
4. Unconfessed sin has a destructive effect on the individual – spiritually, psychologically, physically, and emotionally (cf. Psalm 51).
5. If possible, reconciliation should be made with those we have offended. And if possible, restitution should be made. Remember what Zaccheus said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Luke 19:8).

### III. CONDUCT

1. True contrition leads to confession, which in turn leads to a change in conduct (Joel 2:12, 13; cf. I Thess. 1:9).
2. The LORD told the people of Israel to turn to Him with all their heart with fasting and weeping and mourning (Joel 2:12).
3. Fasting demonstrates humility before God, and our total dependence upon God. Weeping and mourning demonstrates grief and sorrow over sin.
4. It saddens me that so many sinners (as well as many backslidden Christians) are very cold and indifferent about their sin. You tell them they need to get right with God and they just glare at you!
5. Divorce, adultery, skipping church, stealing, lying, cursing, pornography – you name it – they feel no shame, no remorse, no guilt, no contrition, and no repentance.
6. "And rend your heart, and not your garments..." (2:13). In Middle Eastern culture it was customary to tear one's garments when expressing deep grief. When Reuben discovered that his brother Joseph was no longer in the pit, "he rent his clothes" (Gen. 37:29).
7. Then the brothers took Joseph's coat of many colors and dipped it in goat blood, and gave it to their father Jacob. Jacob assumed that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast, and Genesis 37:34 says, "Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days."
8. But here in Joel 2:13, God says, "And rend your heart, and not your garments..." God wants reality, not just an outward show. Some people put on a good show but there is no genuine repentance.

9. Jesus stressed this over and over again, especially in the Sermon on the Mount. Outward actions often cloak a cold and deceitful heart.
10. We need to make sure our hearts are right with God. “Rend your heart.” God is looking for genuine repentance, genuine faith, and genuine godliness.
11. God is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness” (2:13). One preacher put it this way, “God is always more willing to bless than to blast, to pardon than to punish, to win by love than to wound by lashing” (C. Feinberg).
12. But first man must repent.
13. Then when man repents, God “repenteth Him of the evil” (2:13b). This has puzzled many people. How can God repent?
14. Zech. 1:3 says, “Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts.”
15. So how does God turn? How does God repent? “God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?” (Num. 23:19).
16. The Bible teaches that the nature and character of God are immutable – God does not change. “For I am the LORD, I change not” (Malachi 3:6).
17. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8).
18. And yet the Bible does say that God repents (Joel 2:13b, 14). This is an anthropomorphic term. In other words, from man’s perspective it appears that God repents (cf. Jonah 3:4-10).

**CONCLUSION:** “God declared that He will change His mind concerning judgment when men change their mind, and in repentance turn back to Him. God is slow to anger, and halts the march of His wrath in order that men may repent” (G. Campbell Morgan, *Voices of Twelve Hebrew Prophets*).