



## What Is Repentance?

What is repentance? That's our question for February's installment of the *View from Here*. It's very appropriate, because the season of Lent is drawing near. Well, not just for THAT reason ... it's an essential topic everyday, because in order to be forgiven by God, we need to do more than just feel really badly about our sins.

What is repentance all about anyway? I've been stressing the importance of repentance in my ministry from day one! The season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, which is February 10<sup>th</sup> this year. Lent has been called the season of repentance. Very often, you'll see the color purple in churches during Lent and that color symbolizes sorrow for sin and our humility before our King and Savior. So, the color actually helps us understand what repentance really means.

Now for some, repentance may have a negative connotation, having to do with sorrow and self-loathing. But there is more to it than that. In fact, the word has a nuance from the Old and the New Testaments. In the Old Testament repentance is connected with the Hebrew word that means to return. God's people were called to return to Him. He beckoned them to be turned from unfaithfulness to following Him. This return was by grace through the power of the Holy Spirit. It was the result of God's rescue and deliverance. The roots of repentance in the Old Testament are very liberating. It's about salvation through God's grace. The New Testament word in Greek is also very similar: "metanoia." It means a change of mind that works complete life change. In fact, in the New Testament we hear how repentance is actually a gift from God. In Luke 5, Jesus said, **"I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance"** (Luke 5:32). Jesus is the One who brings us to repentance. In other words, God turns people around. He is the giver of that repentance. Repentance is God's gift by His Spirit that returns us to Himself and changes our hearts from trusting in ourselves to trusting in the saving work of Jesus for us.

At the same time, there's also a sense of sorrow involved with repentance, but the sorrow is connected with a heart that is grieved over sin and rebellion against God. This has been called **contrition**. Of course we lament over the life that separated us from God. We teach in our church *"that contrition is the genuine terror of a conscience that feels God's wrath against sin and is sorry that it has sinned. This contrition takes place when the Word of God denounces sin in our lives"* (The Apology of the Augsburg Confession XII 29).

We recognize our desperate need, but sorrow and terror of conscience don't necessarily lead to true repentance. You could be very sorry and grieved over wrongdoing, but be stuck in your pain and regret. The ultimate key to repentance is putting your faith in God's Good News for you. The only way out of our predicament is through the Gospel that offers, as the Bible and Church teach, *"the forgiveness of sins, the righteousness of God for Christ's sake,"* and grants us *"the Holy Spirit and eternal life,"* that leads *"us as regenerated people to do good things"* (The Apology XII 29-30).

Let's use the Lenten color of purple to help us remember some things: First, the darkness of the color purple represents the darkness of our own sin. Hear what God's law says accurately, truthfully, and personally about your own sin. Let God have an honest say with you and your life. Think about how you, not your neighbor, your friend, or your family, but how **YOU** fall short and need forgiveness in your life. Be led to genuine contrition. But don't stop there! In fact God **wants** you to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let the love of God, then, release you from the burden of your real guilt and return you to the open and compassionate arms of your Savior. You are forgiven by faith in Christ. Remember the Bible says, **"God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance"** (Romans 2:4). Hear the Gospel ... the Good News of new and eternal life through Jesus' death and resurrection for you.

That proclamation is also a way of life. We **get to** (not 'must'!) walk each day in repentance, trusting not in our merits, but in Christ's work for us. That's the other side of the color purple during Lent. By grace, through faith, you are a child of the King with a royal pedigree and a royal destiny as His followers.

That's the View from Here. Have a blessed and penitential Lent!!

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