

OUR REPENTANCE

Every person hearing my voice today has experienced the wonderful joy of forgiveness. Ah yes! Sweet, sweet forgiveness! Whether you are a young boy or girl, whether you are an old man or woman, you have experienced someone's forgiveness. When you are forgiven a heavy burden is lifted from your heart. A sadness is turned to joy. A relationship turned sour has become sweet again. Hope that was thrown to the ground is once more on its feet. Lost love has again been found. All of this because of forgiveness. But what was it that brought the need for forgiveness? SIN!

Hello, I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ.

Sin has all kinds of consequences. But the biggest consequence of sin is that it turns once strong relationships into ashes. Sin breaks what was once a strong tie. When you steal you break someone's trust in you. When you are unfaithful to your spouse you break that person's trust in you. Your unfaithfulness is a betrayal of your spouse's love for you. When you curse God you break open the relationship that God has been building between you and Him. Sin is a breaker! The Bible says "your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear." (Isaiah 59:2 KJV.)

It takes two people to heal the separations caused by sin. It takes the sinner and it takes the one sinned against. The sinner must repent. The offended party must forgive in order for a relationship to be restored. But the offended party must be assured of repentance. Repentance must be demonstrated. The sinner must bring forth fruit that fits repentance.

Jesus was teaching a crowd of people on one occasion when they began to tell him about some "...Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. (2) [Jesus] answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? (3) No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. (4) Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? (5) No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:1-5 ESV.)

Yes, it takes two to heal the damage caused by sin. On the part of the sinner, it takes repentance! On the part of the offended it takes forgiveness. For a relationship to be restored the offended party must be willing to forgive.

Jesus' cousin John had a lot to say about repentance. John was baptizing repentant people in the river Jordan. "And there went out to him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized by him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins." (Mark 1:5 KJV.) "But when [John] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (8) Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. (9) And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. (10) Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Matthew 3:7-10 ESV.)

God sent John on that mission of calling people to repentance in order to prepare the people for the coming of Christ, and John says that a truly repentant person must "bear fruit in keeping with repentance." Many times repentant fruit means that a person will restore what has been lost. In other words, restitution is necessary. Zacchaeus was a man who needed to make restitution in order to demonstrate his repentance. Zacchaeus was a wealthy tax collector. One day Jesus came by to dine with him at his house in Jericho. The Lord's decision to eat with him had a dramatic effect upon Zacchaeus. "Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." (9) And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. (10) For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:8-10 ESV.) Zacchaeus demonstrated his repentance to the Lord by saying that he would restore money to those whom he had cheated.

Not all men are like Zacchaeus. That is, not every repentant person can restore what has been broken, or rebuild what sin has torn down. Consider Pilate, whom I mentioned earlier. The people told Jesus that Pilate had mingled the blood of some Galileans with the blood of their sacrifices. It sounds like Pilate must have ordered those people killed even while they were sacrificing their animals in the temple at Jerusalem. We have no evidence that Pilate ever repented of that

murder. But what if he had repented of that act...what fruit could he offer as a sign of his repentance? Pilate could not restore his broken relationship with his victims. He had them killed! It was beyond repair. Repentance cannot always restore things as they were. Could Pilate repent of that deed? Does this mean forgiveness could not be extended to Pilate?

Consider also the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Pilate wanted to release Jesus because Pilate knew that the Jewish leaders had condemned Jesus out of envy, jealousy. The leaders had assembled a large crowd of Jewish people so they could shout, "crucify him crucify him." Pilate replied, "Why, what evil has he done?" But Pilate went ahead with the charade and had Jesus crucified. After the crucifixion, was there any way that Pilate could repent, if repentance means restitution in every case.

Consider also those who shouted "crucify him." That crowd got what they wanted from Pilate. After the crucifixion, could those people repent? Fifty-three days later some of them did repent. On the day of Pentecost, Peter told a Jewish multitude plainly, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (38) And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:36-38 ESV.) Could those people undo what they had done? Could Pilate undo what he had done? No. You see, the fruit of repentance cannot always be discovered in restitution. But it can be seen in the way the person lives from that day forward.

King David, of the Old Testament, could not undo what he did to Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and then when by trickery he could not hide his sin from her husband Uriah, he had Uriah murdered. And all of this sin from a man who in his youth had been called a "man after God's own heart." (1 Samuel 13:14.) When David came to repentance he wrote a song. We number it, Psalm 51. "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. (16) For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. (17) The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (Psalm 51:15-17 ESV.) A broken and contrite heart is the fruit of repentance. A broken and contrite heart

cannot always mend all that has been broken, but that kind of heart is the basis of a change of life, true repentance.

Yes friends, sinners must repent, if they expect to receive forgiveness. But the extension of forgiveness must also be present. The offended party must be willing to forgive. Sin is a serious offense. Sin breaks relationships. Sin causes hurt feelings and stirs up hatred. Can the offended party overcome the hatred and give forgiveness? The Bible says that our heavenly Father hates sin. But the Bible also says that the Heavenly Father loves the world. But the Bible also clearly shows that God is just in punishing sinners according to their sins. The Bible says that the “wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23.)

These three characteristics of the Father of all mankind cause God to have a dilemma. God hates sin, but loves the sinner. God would like nothing more than to forgive those whom He loves. But how can God be just and forgive sinners? You see, forgiveness must be justified. The repentant sinner must still pay the wages of his sin. If a guilty man stands before the judge can the judge say “I forgive you”? No; the judge must render a just judgment, or else he will be counted as an unjust judge. The judge may even be accused of taking a bribe if he “forgives” the guilty! This is the reason God sent Jesus Christ to the world, to take upon Himself the penalty for sin. The wages of sin is death and Jesus died that death! Jesus was God’s only begotten son. Jesus was tempted in every way like every human is, but yet without sin. Jesus was the only person who could have died for the sins of the world! God’s own Son paid the penalty for all sin. Therefore it is only in the name of Jesus that forgiveness can be extended to the world. Friends, even your personal forgiveness can only be extended in the name of the Lord. That’s right! It is by the command of Jesus that you can forgive others. Jesus said, “...if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, (15) but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matt 6:14-15 ESV.) Our heavenly Father did something we humans usually do not do. He extended forgiveness even before we asked for it! That’s right! “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:8 ESV.) And now it is your turn. Will you repent and be baptized so as to receive forgiveness?