

# Repentance

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (*2 Corinthians 5:14-20*)

**God has come close to us.** He became man in Jesus, he gave himself, his life in order that we might be reconciled to him, that we might become his children.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ...The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ...No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. (*John 1:1-18*)

**Receiving Jesus** means finding deep unity with God; it is a completeness that we can attain **only through him.**

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves." (*John 14:6-11*)

Jesus gave testimony about the reliability of his message through his own life. His pure, sinless life is also an example for us. He did not merely come so that we should pay tribute to him as a good person, a wise teacher, through whom we might also become better and wiser. He spoke about things that touch our lives very deeply: we have to be **born from above** in order to gain eternal life....

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again [1] he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" (*John 3:1-7*)

Everyone who is ready to honestly confront himself will see and experience the imperfection and emptiness in his life. He knows that although he would like to love, he is often stubborn. Although he would like to be good, he is envious. He knows that he often fills in his life with acts of compensation, when he should actually find the real aim....

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." (*John 4:13-18*)

This woman longed for a spring which provides living water, so that whoever drinks of it will never be thirsty again. Her life, her sins, her relationships demonstrate that she had been seeking in vain; she did not find real fulfilment. She had to accept that Jesus exposed what was in her heart and helped her to confront herself with her own life and with God. Whether we have the courage to be confronted with God or whether we turn our back on him, one thing is clear: **if God is missing from our life there is nothing which satisfies, nothing which provides real life.** As long as we refuse to accept the fact that we need help and liberation, we cannot approach him.

And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (*Mark 2:17*)

I can explain away my egotism by saying, "I just want to have a good time"; I can call my pride "attitude", a lie "self-defence", fornication "love", but none of that changes the fact that God gave us our life for another purpose. He gave us life so that we might live for others, serving and loving them, that we might be honest, faithful and righteous—just as he himself is.

Many people put confidence in their own abilities, relying on their feelings and their own strength, thus deceiving themselves. They only see the short-lived, quickly passing fulfilment and close their eyes to what

has lasting value—just like the younger son in Jesus’ parable who thought that he could manage to be happy on his own....

And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.” *(Luke 15:11-24)*

We have to find our way home—to **him**—because all of us are lost until we live in the Father’s house, close to him, in his protecting, sheltering love. If we live without him, we turn away from the self-giving love with which he drew close to us. This is the greatest sin: not to reconcile to God. **Every one of us needs God’s love and forgiveness** because he desires to set us free from dishonesty, egotism, vanity, envy, pride, lovelessness—from all the sin in our lives.

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. *(Titus 3:3-7)*

There are points in which we can perhaps change ourselves with our own strength or willpower. There are mistakes which we can perhaps correct. But that does not provide us with new life, it does not change us to the core. We can only have real life, eternal life, when God draws close to us and gives us life....

If we continue to live without God, as the world does, the decisions we make without God distort our character in many ways. It is not enough to gauge or compare ourselves with others.... Jesus showed us the standard he set....

And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.” *(John 8:11)*

Perhaps you have never done as many bad things as this woman whose story is described in John 8:1-11; perhaps, in your own way, you are a good person; perhaps you even revere God in your own way—nevertheless you might be missing something....

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honour your father and mother.'" And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." (*Mark 10:17-27*)

Jesus did not run after that young man to see if he would at least be ready to give away half of his possessions. Giving a part of what I have is not enough. Living an ethical life, being religious, sticking to certain principles is not sufficient. Jesus calls you to surrender your whole life to God, to place your longings, plans, and wounds in his hands.... Everyone has his own "wealth" which separates him from God if he is not ready to give it up in order to do God's will. Perhaps it is not possessions, but knowledge, fame or a relationship....

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (*Matthew 10:37-39*)

Many people wanted to be with Jesus, because they were fascinated by his love, purity, wisdom and goodness. But when Jesus began to speak about what it means to follow him, many left him. Repentance, which consists of **receiving Jesus**, is never limited to an emotional experience, a burst of feelings, but is a deep **decision to be obedient**, to allow him to be Lord and transform my very being.

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." (*Mark 8:34-35*)

While many people are touched by Jesus in some way, we cannot set limits on him. We cannot accept from him only what seems good and pleasant to us, wanting the “blessings” while at the same time refusing to carry the cross, which involves being despised by the world like he was, sharing his fate, being obedient till death....

Unfortunately, a kind of “repentance” is often preached today in which, with reference to the grace of God, a person is not required to take up the cross daily, where they do not have to lose their life—or if they do, then only later as the culmination of a long and drawn out process of repentance. In this way the truth is distorted. There is, however, only **one truth**. It is only through acknowledging and accepting God’s word that **we can have eternal life**.

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?” Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house for ever; the son remains for ever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” (*John 8:31-36*)

**Receiving Jesus** means identifying ourselves completely with the truth he revealed. Then it is no longer I who set the standard for my life. It is no longer *my* plans, *my* aims, *my* concept of the world, myself and God that matter. Instead what matters is the reality.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (*Romans 12:1-2*)

The truth is not a subjective notion which I can reshape to suit my own ideas. I am the one who has to adapt and submit myself to the truth. Jesus expects us to trust him and everything he said unconditionally. Only the truth can satisfy us. Only in the truth can we find true love.

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. (*John 14:21*)

**Receiving Jesus**, therefore, does not only mean that I believe that he lived, died and rose from the dead, but that I submit my life to everything that he revealed. Praying a “sinner’s prayer” after being emotionally moved by a sermon is not sufficient....

When Zacchaeus the tax-collector received the call of Jesus he was moved by the love and mercy Jesus showed him. But he did not stop there; he was willing to change his life and to act. He was immediately ready to give up everything in his life which was not in accordance with God’s will.

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature. So he ran on

ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (*Luke 19:1-10*)

**Living according to God's will....** The gospel is precisely this "good news" of God's grace that enables us to follow Jesus, to love with a pure, true love, just as he did. If we accept this gladly, it will bear fruit in our lives as well....

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. ...As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains for ever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you. (*1 Peter 1:8-9,14-25*)

**Repentance**, therefore, is visible, tangible and real in a person's life, because Jesus' salvation purifies us from our former passions "for a sincere brotherly love" and gives us the strength to "love one another earnestly from a pure heart". This is the fruit which cannot be imitated and that only his power can cause in us. It is possible to do many things "in the name of Jesus", and nevertheless deceive ourselves....

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord", will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness." (*Matthew 7:21-23*)

Jesus brought God's love to us in order that through him we might also be able to love. He does not invite us to a religious programme, but to self-devotion. The first Christians, who repented through the preaching of the apostles, understood this message and shared their lives with one another. Day by day they lovingly devoted their lives to each other (see Acts 2:37-47).

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. (1 John 4:7-12)

If you repent, if you receive Jesus and, through him, the love of God, you will be able to join the apostle in saying:

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (1 John 3:14-16)

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#### Footnotes

1. Or *from above*.

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