

### **TEACHING GOAL**

To understand the nature of repentance unto life.

### **DOCTRINAL STANDARDS**

Q. What is repentance unto life?

A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of and endeavor after, new obedience.

S.C. 87, L.C. 76, W.C. of F. XV, Savoy 15, Young 56

### **SCRIPTURAL BASIS**

**Study Passage:**      II Corinthians 7

**Support Passages:** Psalm 51:5-13, 80:3,7,19; Acts 2:37-38, 5:30-31, 11:18; II Timothy 2:25;

### **BIBLE STORY**

Luke 15:11-24; The prodigal son underwent a radical change of direction in his life and so illustrates repentance.

### **MEMORY ASSIGNMENT**

"Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause." (Isaiah 1:16-17, ESV)

### **APPLICATION**

Given that the ability to repent from sin comes to us as a gift from God and that the Lord Jesus came not "to call righteous men but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32) establishing repentance as a priceless evangelical grace, we ought to see to it that we bring forth fruit that befits our repentance.

## SUMMARY

In the previous lesson we studied saving faith and now repentance unto life. These two evangelical graces go hand in hand. They are both "the exercises of a regenerate heart alone; they presuppose the new birth"<sup>1</sup> which is not of ourselves but comes from above.<sup>2</sup> It is the Living and True God who "has caused us to be born again to a living hope ..." <sup>3</sup> That the ability to repent comes from God is stated clearly in passages such as Acts 5:31 where God grants repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. In Acts 11:18 God grants "repentance that leads to life" to the Gentiles and in II Timothy 2:25 the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome with those who oppose Christ "if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth." In Psalm 80 Asaph prays, "O God of hosts, restore us, and cause Thy face to shine upon us, and we will be saved." He prays thus because he knows that all that is involved with effecting our salvation comes from God including the Savior, our saving faith and our repentance unto life. According to Dabney, "Repentance and Faith are twin graces, both implicitly contained in the gift of the new heart; and they cannot but coexist. Repentance is the right sense and volition which the renewed heart has of its sin; faith is the turning of that heart from its sin to Christ. Repentance feels the disease, faith embraces the remedy."<sup>4</sup>

Both the Greek New Testament and the Hebrew Old Testament use two different words which we translate as "repent" in English. One means sorrow or regret while the other means change or turn away toward another course of action. Both words are used in almost all cases as synonyms; words which refer to the same thing. Thus the English word repent bears the meaning of turning away from sin unto God and to do so with grief and hatred for our sin. In addition, the word "repent" is used in connection with God. He is said to repent in Genesis 6:6, "And the LORD was sorry (repented) that He had made man on the earth ...". In the context of the sin at Horeb where Israel made the golden calf in Exodus 32:12 and 14 God is said to repent in the sense that He changed His mind about doing harm to His people. This is speaking anthropomorphically. This is to use human terms to describe some aspect of God's person or activity. So then we have seen several contexts in which "repent" is used to refer to a turning away and a feeling of sorrow.

The prodigal son was an example of just such a repentance. He willfully departed from the house of his father and wasted his substance on things that gave no lasting satisfaction or that through which he could not survive. Rather than return home, he sought out other fathers, other means of survival which

failed him completely. As such the prodigal typifies each one of us. We, just like this young man, are prodigals. By nature we have left any claim to our heavenly home and to God the Father. By nature we are completely estranged from God and we like the prodigal will not go home to God the Father and we try to find any other means to survive and to escape from the guilt of our sin.

The son is lost and so are we. The focus of the parable really is on the fact that the son was lost rather than that he was a prodigal. He could not rise up to go home to his father until he had a change of mind; until he repented. And lest we think that this prodigal changed the course of his life by himself, consider just how rare such behavior really is. Actually no one will by himself see returning to God the Father as the only viable alternative to the problems of life.

We read, "'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.'"<sup>5</sup> God himself must have caused this young man to know his great need such that he recognized that he sinned against God as well as his earthly father. His repentance consisted in that he turned away from his sin and his appalling condition to the only one who could and would help him. There is much more for us in this parable but we take special notice here of the act of repentance.

Paul considers the other aspect of repentance in 2 Corinthians 7, namely the aspect of sorrow. A letter that Paul wrote previously to the Corinthians caused them certain sorrow.<sup>6</sup> He probably rebuked their sin as he did in I Corinthians 5. However, Paul rejoices in the sorrow he caused in that church because as he writes, "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death."<sup>7</sup> There is then a repentance that leads to salvation. There is a repentance unto life. It is a repentance that is brought to pass in a believer by God.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert L. Dabney, Lectures in Systematic Theology, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing house, 1972, p. 656.

<sup>2</sup> John 3:3

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 1:3

<sup>4</sup> Robert L. Dabney, Lectures in Systematic Theology, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing house, 1972, p. 658

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 15:17-19, ESV

<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 7:8

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 7:10, ESV