

Confession *and* Repentance: The Conditions of Revival



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 5:30–32, 2 Cor. 7:9–11, Lev. 5:5, 1 John 1:9, Heb. 12:17, Ps. 32:1–8.*

Memory Text: “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (*Proverbs 28:13, NKJV*).

Throughout Scripture, both repentance and confession have prepared the way for spiritual revival. God has always prepared His people to do a great work for Him by leading them to godly sorrow for their sins. Once we acknowledge our sins and confess them, we are on track to have victory over them.

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (*2 Pet. 3:9*). Repentance and confession are two prerequisites needed in order for us to receive the Spirit’s power in abundance.

In this week’s lesson, we will trace the importance of true repentance in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as it is revealed in the book of Acts. We will also contrast true repentance with false repentance. Most of all, we will discover that repentance is a gift that the Holy Spirit gives in order to help us to reflect Jesus’ love to those around us.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 10.*

Repentance: God's Gift

During the weeks before Pentecost, the disciples earnestly sought God in prayer. Acts 1:14 says that they were in “one accord in prayer and supplication.” This experience of “one accord” reveals a strong unity and harmony among Christ’s followers that would not have been possible without repentance and confession. Prayer and confession prepared them for what was going to come.

Read Acts 5:30–32. What important points can we take from what Peter said here?

Peter makes two critical points. First, repentance is a gift. As we open our hearts to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, Jesus gives us the gift of repentance. Second, the disciples themselves were witnesses in their own lives of the reality of repentance. They not only preached repentance, they experienced it.

“As the disciples waited for the fulfillment of the promise, they humbled their hearts in true repentance and confessed their unbelief. As they called to remembrance the words that Christ had spoken to them before His death they understood more fully their meaning. . . . As they meditated upon His pure, holy life they felt that no toil would be too hard, no sacrifice too great, if only they could bear witness in their lives to the loveliness of Christ’s character.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 36.

Repentance and confession are common themes throughout Acts (*Acts 17:30, 31; 26:19, 20*). It is “the goodness of God” that leads us to repentance; it is the convicting power of the Holy Spirit that brings us to the realization of our need for a sin-pardoning Savior. At the same time, we must remember that the Holy Spirit does not fill unrepentant hearts (*Rom. 2:8; Acts 2:38, 39; 3:19*). The Holy Spirit fills hearts emptied of selfish ambition, of the desire for personal recognition, and of the drive for personal glory.

Why is it so difficult to acknowledge our sins and repent of them? Why is it so easy to let self get in the way of true repentance?

True Repentance Defined

How does the apostle Paul describe true repentance? *2 Cor. 7:9–11.*

Repentance is a God-initiated sorrow for sin. It also includes a decision to forsake whatever specific sins that the Holy Spirit brings to mind (*Ezek. 14:6, Zech. 1:4*). Genuine repentance does not lead Christians into a state of deep depression because of their sinful natures or deeds. “Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation” (*2 Cor. 7:10, NKJV*). It leads us, instead, to focus on Jesus’ righteousness, not our sinfulness. It produces a “diligence” in “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (*2 Cor. 7:11, Heb. 12:2*).

Throughout the New Testament, we see that the enormity of our sin is never greater than the enormity of His grace. For “where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (*Rom. 5:20, NKJV*). This was certainly true in the apostle Paul’s experience.

Read 1 Timothy 1:14–17 and Acts 26:10–16. What do these passages tell you about Paul’s sinfulness and Jesus’ righteousness?

When the apostle Paul realized that he was persecuting the Lord of glory, he was driven to his knees in genuine repentance and confession. Throughout his entire life he never tired of telling the story of his own sinfulness and God’s grace. His repentance did not leave him in a state of depression; instead, it drove him into the arms of an all-loving and forgiving Savior. The confession of his sin did not leave him feeling guiltier than before. His focus was not on how unrighteous he was but on how righteous Jesus was.

Have you ever felt that you were the “chief” of sinners? Or, if not the chief, still too sinful to be saved? How can you learn to rest in the assurance that Christ’s righteousness is enough to save you?

True Repentance and Confession

What spiritual principles do we learn from Leviticus 5:5; 1 John 1:9; Isaiah 1:16–18; and Acts 26:19, 20 regarding the nature of true repentance and confession?

Genuine repentance is always accompanied by confession of specific sins. The Holy Spirit does not give us vague feelings of guilt. He convicts us of our definite shortcomings.

“True confession is always of a specific character, and acknowledges particular sins. They may be of such a nature as to be brought before God only; they may be wrongs that should be confessed to individuals who have suffered injury through them; or they may be of a public character, and should then be as publicly confessed. But all confession should be definite and to the point, acknowledging the very sins of which you are guilty.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 38.

The purpose of the convicting power of the Holy Spirit is to reveal our need of the saving grace of Christ. Repentance does not make God love us more; rather, it enables us to appreciate His love more. Confession does not earn God’s forgiveness; it instead enables us to receive His forgiveness. God does not love us more when we repent or love us less when we fail to. His love for us is constant. The only variable is our response to the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The truth is that our hearts are hindered from receiving the abundant blessings that God has for us while our spiritual arteries are clogged with the sludge of sin. Sin deadens us to the Spirit’s prompting and makes it harder for us to respond to Him. Repentance and confession open the clogged channels of our spiritual hearts so that we may receive the overflowing of the Holy Spirit’s presence and power.

However much we long for forgiveness when we confess and repent, we must remember that this is a two-way street. That is, how do we respond to those who have treated us wrongly and who ask for forgiveness? Who, though totally undeserving of our forgiveness, do we need to forgive anyway, and why is it so important for us to forgive?

True and False Repentance Contrasted

There are some very specific examples in the Bible of people who sought repentance but were not forgiven by God. They wept. They were sorrowful. They confessed their sin but were not forgiven. Read the accounts of Pharaoh, Balaam, Esau, and Judas in Exodus 12:29–32, Numbers 22:32–35, Hebrews 12:17, and Matthew 27:4.

What common thread do you see running through each story in regard to repentance and/or confession?

One phrase in Hebrews 12:17 sums it up well. Speaking of Esau, the passage says that “when he wanted to inherit the blessing” (*NKJV*) he repented. Like Pharaoh, Balaam, and Judas, Esau’s heart was not broken over the pain that his sin had brought to his family or to the heart of God. His concern was over the birthright he had lost. He was sorry that he had not received that which he believed to be rightfully his. His motives were not pure. His sorrow was for himself. False repentance focuses upon the consequences of sin as opposed to the sin itself.

The law of sowing and reaping is a divine law. It is true that sin brings dire consequences, but repentance is not consumed with the negative results of sin. It is concerned, instead, with the dishonor and sorrow that our sin has brought to God.

True repentance is always characterized by at least three things: First, a sorrow that our sin has broken God’s heart. We are hurt because we hurt the One who loves us so much. Second, there is an honest confession of the specific sin that we have committed. True repentance is not laced with excuses for our behavior. It does not place blame on someone else. It takes responsibility for our actions. Third, true repentance always includes the decision to turn away from our sin. There can be no genuine repentance unless there is a corresponding reformation in the life. False repentance, on the other hand, is self-centered. It is concerned with the consequences of our sin. It is an emotional state of sorrow because our sins often bring negative consequences. It makes excuses and lays the blame on someone else. It is unconcerned about the changing of behavior unless the change will personally bring its own rewards.

Confession's Healing Power

Confession lances the boil of guilt and allows the poisonous pus of sin to drain. Confession is healing in many ways. It opens our hearts to receive God's grace. Through confession we accept the forgiveness that Christ freely offers us from the Cross. Confession is healing because it allows us to receive grace. Confession also breaks down barriers between us and other people. It heals relationships.

Read Psalm 32:1–8. What does this teach us about confession and repentance?

Read Acts 24:16. The apostle Paul strove for a “conscience void to offence toward God, and toward men.” What does that mean?

Is guilt good or bad? It all depends. If the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, and the guilt of that sin drives us to Jesus, guilt is good. If we have already confessed our sin and continue to feel guilty, the guilt may become destructive. “This feeling of guiltiness must be laid at the foot of the cross of Calvary. The sense of sinfulness has poisoned the springs of life and of true happiness. Now Jesus says, ‘Lay it all on Me. I will take your sins. I will give you peace. Banish no longer your self-respect, for I have bought you with the price of My own blood. You are mine. Your weakened will I will strengthen; your remorse for sin I will remove.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 9, p. 305. The answer to guilt is Jesus. His grace abolishes the destructive guilt sin lays upon us.

There are times we may have confessed our sins and we still feel guilty. Why? One reason might be that the devil is attempting to rob us of the assurance of salvation. He loves to steal away the blessed assurance of forgiveness and salvation that we have in Jesus. Second, the Holy Spirit may be pointing out something that exists between us and another individual. If we have hurt another individual, our troubled conscience will be eased when we confess our wrong to the person whom we have hurt.

How has guilt impacted your relationship with the Lord and with others? What can you do to help to alleviate the burden of guilt that you carry? Even if you have done wrong and the guilt is in a sense justified, what promises can you claim from the Bible to help you to move on?

Further Study: “Confession will not be acceptable to God without sincere repentance and reformation. There must be decided changes in the life; everything offensive to God must be put away. This will be the result of genuine sorrow for sin. The work that we have to do on our part is plainly set before us: ‘Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.’ Isaiah 1:16, 17. ‘If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die.’ Ezekiel 33:15.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 39.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What crucial lesson about forgiveness can we learn from Jesus’ willingness to forgive those who nailed Him to the cross? If He was willing to do that, how much more so should we be willing to forgive those who have hurt us?
- 2 In your own experience, how has confession of sin been a blessing to you? In what ways has it helped you in your relationship, not only with the Lord but with others?
- 3 Though we read this week about the need, at times, to confess to other people whom we have wronged, why must we always be very careful in what we say to others?
- 4 True repentance, we have read, includes a putting away of sin. What happens, however, if we—struggling with that sin—fall into it again? Does that mean our repentance wasn’t sincere? Does it mean we cannot be forgiven for it again? If this were true, what hope would any of us have? How are we to understand the nature of biblical repentance while always keeping in mind the reality of our sinful natures?
- 5 From what we have studied this week, why is repentance a vital component in the whole issue of revival and reformation? How do the terms *revival* and *reformation* contain within themselves the idea that we do need to repent?

The Newspaper Ad

Alexei scanned the classified ads of his local newspaper in Siberia, Russia. He wanted to be sure that his ad for home improvements was attractive and his prices competitive. His eyes fell on the religious section of classified ads. The ads there offered to tell people's fortunes or read their palms. *So many ads for Satan, and not one for Christ*, Alexei thought. He grabbed a paper and scribbled the words "I will tell you about Christ" and he added his telephone number. The next day he placed the ad in the paper.

His phone began ringing. Most callers had their own advertisements in the paper and wanted to know what Alexei would tell people about Christ. Some wanted to argue theology. Alexei wondered whether his advertisement would reach anyone who was searching for God.

The phone rang again, and Alexei offered a cheerful "Hello."

"I want to know about Christ," a weathered voice said. The men spoke for several minutes, then the caller invited Alexei to visit him.

An elderly man answered Alexei's knock. The two men talked several minutes, and then the older man said, "I'm old, and I'm not well. I want to know about God while I have time." Alexei opened his Bible and read several verses about God. Then they watched an evangelistic video. For 10 days the two studied God's Word together. Alexei's new friend is eager to learn more.

Normally Alexei doesn't answer his phone on Sabbath because most calls are about work. But recently he received several calls from the same person on Sabbath. *Maybe it's an emergency*, Alexei thought. He answered the phone.

"Are you a Christian?" a young man asked. Alexei answered his question. "I'm Vitaly," the caller said. "I just got out of prison, and I need to talk to you."

The two met, and Vitaly told Alexei that while he was in prison, a Seventh-day Adventist woman had sent him *The Great Controversy*. He had read it and wanted to know more about God. Then he found Alexei's newspaper advertisement.

Vitaly now attends the Seventh-day Adventist church and is eager to know God personally. "I know that Alexei's advertisement was God calling me," Vitaly says.

Alexei now knows that God called him to place that ad in the paper. "People are searching for spiritual insight; I want to introduce them to Jesus."

God uses simple things to draw people to Him. Our prayers and our mission offerings strengthen God's work around the world. Our own ministry strengthens God's work at home. What ministry has God given you?

ALEXEI continues sharing his faith in Krasnoyarsk, Russia, where part of a recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is helping to build a new church for a growing congregation.

Revive

US AGAIN

MARK A. FINLEY

“A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs”

(Selected Messages, bk. 1, p. 121).

Revival always begins with one man, one woman, one boy, or one girl on his or her knees, seeking God. You can be that one person who is used of God to bring the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on your home, your church, and your world.



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ENGAGING OUR YOUTH



Holding onto our youth is a challenge everywhere. But in the Czech Republic, where only 10 percent of the population attends any religious service, the challenge is urgent.

INRI Road (the Way of Jesus) is a youth-powered outreach focused on keeping university-age young people connected to the church through social, educational, and spiritual gatherings throughout the week. “Religion isn’t a Sabbath-only commitment. Our faith is who we are—and Whose we are. We want

to keep Adventist young people connected and bring fellow students to Jesus,” one member explained.

Part of this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help INRI Road keep Adventist youth connected to God and help bring other youth to Jesus in one of the most atheistic countries in Europe.

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