

The Prodigal's Suffering from Sin

Jack Hughes

February 8, 2009

You can turn to Luke 15, [where] we're going to be continuing to look at the parable of the prodigal son and his repentance.

A little over eight years ago I came to Calvary Bible Church. Raise your hand if you came to Calvary Bible Church after 2001. Look at that: about half the people [in the congregation raised their hands]. There we go. When I came in August 2000, I started with preaching a series on the character and attributes of the Word of God, and then began an exposition, [which lasted] about two years, in 1 Timothy. It was interesting at that time. I was the outsider. I hadn't been here [for very long], but many people were very angry at me, and had left [the church]. There were all sorts of rumors and things going on, [with people saying I didn't] believe in the Holy Spirit, [that] women ha[d] to wear hats to church, and [that I was] trying to destroy the AWANA ministry. [There were] all kinds of odd things [being said].

Many [people attending the church at that time] didn't like it that when they came to church they felt uncomfortable in their sin. Well, I'm glad. *I'm glad*. I would never want to be a preacher who made people feel comfortable in their sin. Some people had come to me—actually quite a few came to me—and they were angry because I was preaching repentance. In fact, I had some people say, “Why do you keep telling people that they need to repent?”

I said, “Because they need to repent.” I thought it was odd. I thought, “What’s going on here? Why is there this antipathy against repentance?” In the Old Testament, Solomon teaches about repentance, [and] the psalmists teach about repentance. Psalm 7:[12] teaches: “If a man does not repent, [God] will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and made it ready.” To me that says [that] we had better repent. It’s interesting, as you go through [the Bible, you see that] Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Jonah, [and] Zechariah [all] call people to repentance. John the Baptist came on the scene, calling people to repentance. Jesus preached repentance. He sent the apostles out to preach repentance. Even in the book of Acts, Paul tells the Greeks at Mars Hill [that] “God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent” [Acts 17:30].

So, it was odd to me [that so many people in the church were protesting my preaching on repentance]. I thought, “What is this? What is this whole aversion to repentance?” When you look in the Scriptures you see that there [are] a lot more [words to discuss this concept] than just the word[s] “repentance” and “repent.” There are all sorts of synonyms [for repentance, such as] the word[s] “turn” [see Luke 1:16], “turn from” [see Acts 26:18], “forsake” [see Proverbs 9:6], “flee from and pursue” [see 1 Timothy 6:11], or “lay aside and put on” [see Romans 13:12]. These are all terms that describe repentance. Sometimes the Bible talks about that initial repentance that we need to come to, [which] God brings us to, [which] causes us to be saved. Then there is that ongoing repentance that the grace of God keeps bringing in our lives so that, as we turn to sins as believers, we keep turning away from them.

Repentance is a doctrine taught from stem to stern in the Bible, and as people came to me, upset, and I was talking to them in my office, I just thought, “What is the big deal? It’s all over the place in the Bible.” As I talked to person after person, it became clear to me what the problem was. It wasn’t that they didn’t see repentance in the Bible; it was that they wanted a repentance [that] allowed them to feel comfortable in their sin. The problem [was that] they wanted to call themselves Christians and [yet]

live comfortably in sin. They wanted to live for Satan and call themselves followers of Christ. As I preached repentance from sin, and faith in Jesus Christ, it made them very uncomfortable. They felt guilty about their sin, and they didn't like it. They didn't like leaving on Sunday feeling guilty about their sin, and they would [have] prefer[red] that I [had made] them feel good about it.

[But] by the grace of God, what was really amazing in that time, [was] how many people came to Christ. A lot of people, if you were to talk to them, came to Christ at that time or had radical life changes at that time. I remember one elder pulling me aside, [and] saying, "So, in the ten years before you came here, was it like this?"

I said, "No. People liked me, and very few people came to Christ. I don't know. I'm just preaching the same [things I always have]. God is causing His own little revival here." It was just God working. It wasn't like I had all of a sudden found this secret little truth that I was trying out and it was working. I was just doing the same thing I had always done, and yet God was pleased to bring many people to see that they needed Christ. To me, it was patently obvious that you can't follow Christ and sin and Satan at the same time. Yet, to many, that was not obvious. Maybe it was that they didn't want to own up to the true condition of their [lives], but it is clear in the Word of God that following Christ means forsaking sins.

This morning, we come [again] to the parable of the prodigal son, the most well-known of all the parables in the Bible. When [we] look at it in its larger context, we see that it is a great picture of God's rescuing of sinners. The parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin precede it, and in both of those parables something precious is lost, sought after, retrieved, and rejoiced over. The parable of the prodigal son is much more detailed, though, and so it is worth going through slowly. I thought there was a lot here, but there's more than I even realized.

We looked at the six lies that the prodigal bought [into], which caused him to be lost in sin. First, he was impatiently greedy. Second, he didn't care about others. Third, he thought receiving mercy and grace for a time

meant there would be no judgment in the future. Four[th], he hid from accountability. Fi[fth], he believed sinning would make him happy. Six[th], he lived only for today, with no concern about the future.

This sinful lifestyle, these lies that he bought into, which led him into this far away country of sin and rebellion, then began to have consequences upon his life. These sins, then, had built into them by God painful consequences. There were six of them that we noticed. (I didn't try to [fit everything into six points]; it just worked this way.) This is kind of interesting. [First], sin impoverished him. Second, sin brought him low. Third, sin defiled him. Fourth, sin left him wanting. Fi[fth], sin left him friendless. Six[th], sin blinded him. God used all of these consequences to humble him and to bring him to his senses. As a matter of fact, in [Luke 15:]17, where it says "he came to his senses," is the most significant phrase in the whole parable because it is at that point that the grace of God is first manifested in [the prodigal's] life.

I noted that in some of the commentaries that I was reading (and I read a lot of them on this parable, just because it is so well-known and there is so much here), that several of the commentators [pointed out] that there is a big difference between the parables of the lost sheep and coin and the parable of the prodigal son. In the parable[s] of the lost sheep and coin, the thing that was lost is sought after and found, but in the parable of the prodigal son, that's not the case, at least apparently so. That is why last week I decided to stop and look at this. I [sat] in my office, and [thought], "OK, so the prodigal rebels, the prodigal goes into the far off country, he indulges in sin, and then the father does nothing?" I thought, "No, no, that's not true." The parable is taught from the perspective of the prodigal, but if we know the Bible, and we know how sinners come to repentance, we know that the father was pursuing the son.

You see, what happens is [that] when sinner[s are] enslaved to sin, they don't seek after God. That's what Paul says in Romans 3[:11]: "THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD," which in the Greek means, "there is none who seeks for God." We also know that Jesus came to "to seek and

to save that which was lost" [Luke 19:10], to retrieve sinners. Jesus is like [the] shepherd and the woman [in the parables], in that the shepherd goes searching [and] the woman goes sweeping until they find that which is lost. Men, on their own, will not, in any circumstance, ever seek God on their own, apart from His grace.

This, of course, creates a very interesting dilemma. People know that Romans 3:11 says: "THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD." They know that Ephesians 2:1–3 says that we are spiritually dead and when you're spiritually dead, you're dead spiritually. That means [that] anything that relates to anything spiritual, [such as] salvation, understanding the truth, [or] anything like that, you're dead to that, just like a dead person is dead to anything physical. First Corinthians 2:14 says: "But a natural man," or the unsaved man, "does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him." He just can't do it. He *can't do it*. Well, that is a huge problem because when you think about it, you [have] to understand the gospel in order to be saved. So, how does anybody get saved if they're spiritually dead, if they don't seek God? Paul makes it absolutely, definitively clear in Romans 8:5–8, where he says that men who are in the flesh are "hostile toward God." They do not subject themselves to the law of God. He says they're not even able to do so. That puts us in a huge quandary if we are spiritually dead, spiritually blind, and we can't please God. How in the world does anyone ever come to Christ? Jesus says in John 3[:19]: "Men loved darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil." They will not come to the Light [see John 3:20]. Well, the gospel is the Light, Jesus is the Light, so how do you get somebody who will not come, who *cannot* come, [to come] to the Light?

This causes people to have grief. A lot of people think to themselves, "I see all these verses in the Bible, yet I know my own experience," and this is where they get into danger, "because what happened to me is that I began to be interested in Christianity. I began to look at different religions [and] to have a desire [for something spiritual], so I sought out different religions. I talked to different people, I went to church, I started reading the

Bible. I understood the gospel, I believed, and I was saved.” You hear them saying things like that. “I know that the Scriptures make it clear that men are spiritually dead and unable to do anything to please God, but I did. I know men don’t seek God, but I did.” What they’re really saying is one of two bad things: [either] the Bible is wrong, or the Bible doesn’t mean what it plainly teaches. The reason they say this, the reason they mentally back themselves into this dark corner, is because they create an either/or fallacy in their minds. An either/or fallacy is when you take two wrong answers and say, “Which one is right?” No matter which one you choose, it’s wrong because they’re both wrong answers. The Bible is not wrong, and the Bible teaches exactly what it says.

What is the right answer? That’s what we looked at last week. What was it in the prodigal’s life, after he was hell-bent, squandering his inheritance, run[ning] away from all accountability, plung[ing] himself into as lost as lost can be, defil[ing] himself, feeding swine, [that] brought him to repentance? What made him come to his senses? God, the Father, was hunting him down. That’s what you don’t see in the parable because it is written from the prodigal’s perspective. [In the parable, it seems as though] all of a sudden [the prodigal] came to his senses; he got a clue. But what causes people to get a clue? What brings them to their senses? Do they do it on their own, and God [says], “Hey! Another one got a clue. I think I’ll save him”?

Last week we looked at six actions of God (and, again, I didn’t mean [for] it [to turn out] this way, it just came out [in sets of six]), which bring sinner[s] to [their] senses. First, [they are] chosen by God before the foundation of the world to adoption as sons [see Ephesians 1:4]. They are predestined. The word means “to choose out, to select, to put a fence around beforehand.” It does not mean that God looks into the future to see who will seek Him. No one seeks God. That contradicts the Scriptures. God seeks men. He chooses whom He will save. Second, Jesus needed to die for our sins. If there was no death of Christ, if there was no burial and resur-

rection, then there would be no ground[s], no atonement for sins. So, God had to send Christ to die so that we could be saved.

Third, the Father had to orchestrate circumstances. We could be here for months telling about this in our lives—how God orchestrate[d] these cool circumstances so that we c[a]ome in contact with the gospel. Sometimes it's a tract, a Bible, a radio, a TV, a friend, a coworker, a neighbor, a relative, a mom, [or] a dad. God brings people [into our lives], [and] he orchestrates certain circumstances in our lives [in which] all of a sudden we come in contact with the truth. God does that. Fourth, the Holy Spirit must open our hearts to the truth. Because we're spiritually dead, because we cannot understand the things of God, because we love darkness rather than Light, God must change our hearts. He must illumine us to the truth, so we're like Lydia [when] God "opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul" [Acts 16:14]. All of a sudden, we step back, and we [say], "I can see! I can see the truth." God does that.

Not only that—[fifth]—once we understand the truth by the grace of God, God then gives us the faith to believe. We saw that last week, too, how He grants us the faith to believe. Sixth, we saw that God grants us repentance. He gives us the ability to turn from our sins. Repentance is to have a change of mind that results in an about-face to turn from our sins to God. Faith lays hold of, grabs on to, trusts in, Jesus. Repentance rejects, lets go of, turns from whatever idols, sins, [or] whatever [else for which] you're living. Before Jesus, it lets go. That's why the Bible speaks of [faith/belief and repentance] interchangeably. Sometime the Bible just says "repent" [see Matthew 3:2]. Other times it says "repent and believe" [see Mark 1:15]. Other times it just says "believe" [see Mark 5:36]. Why? [It is] because you never believe in a saving way unless you've repented, and you've never repented in a saving way unless you [have] believed. If you're going to leave London and fly to Los Angeles, you must leave London, and you must arrive in Los Angeles. You say, "But that's two things." No, it's one trip: a leaving and an arriving—one thing. And so it is with saving faith.

If you're going to have saving faith, you must have true repentance. And so it is with true repentance—you must have saving faith. They go together.

Some people have said, "Repentance is adding works to salvation." You may have heard that one. "The Bible says 'believe and have faith,' but [it does] not [add] repentance."

"Oh, really? So, when Jesus says 'unless you repent you will all likewise perish' [Luke 13:3], He doesn't really mean that?" We saw why repentance is not adding works to salvation because Acts 5:31 and 11:17–18, Romans 2:4, and 2 Timothy 2:25, which we referenced last week, all say that repentance is granted by God's grace to sinners. Then, having received that gracious gift of repentance, [people] get a clue, come to their senses, [and] turn from their sins to Christ. It's amazing because when sinner[s] come to their senses, they have no idea. They have no idea what is going on in their [lives]. They have no idea that God chose them before the foundation of the world, that Christ died on the cross for their sins, that the Holy Spirit is working, that God is giving them the faith they need, and granting them repentance. They have no idea of these things. A lot of times they're just totally clueless. Just all of a sudden, they snap out of it, and [say], "Look what I did!" They don't know.

When we look at our text, the incredible thing is when it says, in [Luke 15:]17, that [the prodigal] "came to his senses," God the Father was behind the scenes, working in his life to bring him to that place. That is why last week we looked at [the idea that] repentance is a gift of God and looked at those six aspects that God does behind the scenes to bring us to that place where we come to our senses. This morning, we're going to look at the last five [aspects of God's work behind the scenes]. Let's look at the text again [in] Luke 15. Follow along as I read [Luke 15:]11–20.

And He said, "A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and

went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."' So he got up and came to his father."

We have already seen [that the first aspect] was that repentance is a gift of God, and now we're going to look at the other five aspects of this prodigal's repentance.

The first [aspect we're going to address] today, [which is] the second in the list of six, is: Repentance seeks the blessing of salvation. Look at the middle of [Luke 15:]17. [The prodigal] said: "How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread?" Now just stop there. Here he is, he has awakened from his spiritual[ly] dead state. All of a sudden, he gets a clue: "How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread to eat? I'm starving here for pig slop, and my father's men have more than enough to eat." What's interesting here is [that] the word "hired men" or "workmen," is a word that describes day laborer[s]. We're not talking about the people in his [father's] permanent employ. These are people that you go up to on the side of the road, and say, "Hey, [do] you want to come [and] dig a ditch? Do you want to rake some leaves? Do you want to do this task?" They work, you send them away with the cash, and you never see them again. That's what kind of men [to whom the word is referring]. We're not

talking about intimate relationship[s] here, we're talking about the most basic, temporary relationships, and the prodigal sees that his father even takes care of those people better than what he, [the prodigal], is getting.

And you know what? This is what true repentance does to us. [Before repentance], we're living in the land of sin. We're kind of like cockroaches [that] hide from the light, and then God turns us into moths and we're just drawn toward it. All of a sudden, we get interested in God like never before. We want to read our Bibles like never before. We want to serve God like never before. We want to learn about Jesus like never before. We want to be around God's people like never before. All of a sudden all of these things happen to us like never before. We become like the kingdom saint that Jesus describes in Matthew 5:6: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," like never before. It's a miracle that God does in our [lives] and we don't even know why. We just [think], "I've got to have that. I've got to go to church. I've got to read my Bible." I don't know about you, but when I first came to Christ, I could not have enough Bible. I read my Bible all the time. I [also] just wore out tape players listening to tapes. I had tapes everywhere. It was like ten sermons a day was not enough. I just [thought], "Hit me! Hit me! Harder!"

We become like David, who cried out in Psalm 51:7: "Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." [We]'re just drawn to God and [we] just want [Him] to fix [us]. [As David] writes in Psalm 42:1-2: "As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God?" That's true repentance. That's it.

Someone says, "Well, I'm a Christian. I love Christ, but I don't want to stop living with my girlfriend. I don't want to stop looking at pornography. You don't expect me to read my Bible and study my Bible, and give, and serve, and actually act like a Christian, do you?" We'd be right to tell them, as John the Baptist and Jesus told others like them, "Bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance" [see Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8]. When saving grace invades [people's lives], when it produces true repentance, all of a sudden

they see the goodness of heaven, the goodness of Christ. They want the things of God more than the things of this world. The question is: Does that describe you? Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? Do you hunger to know God? If not, you haven't experienced true repentance. You're still lost. Because when God gets a hold of you, you become the "deer that pants after the water brooks" [see Psalm 42:1], not the sins of the world.

Third: Repentance feels broken over the treachery of one's sin. Look at the end of [Luke 15:]17. Having come to his senses, [the prodigal] says: "But I am dying here with hunger!" The grace of God working behind the scenes has brought him around, and he sees himself as perishing, dying of hunger. He is broken over the decisions he has made. This is a whole picture, mind you, of a sinner coming to repentance. He realizes, "Oh! I am dying of hunger here in the land of sin." That's what happens when you come to repentance. Every fish loves to chew on the bait at the beginning, right before the hook sets in. Every mouse loves that momentary pleasure of nibbling on the cheese right before the iron bar snaps its neck. What happens is [that] when the grace of God comes into your life, you realize, "There is a hook here. There is an iron bar coming. I have got to get out of here. This is killing me! This *will* kill me." It causes [people] to see the ugliness of their sin, to be broken over it, and to cry out for mercy.

David says in Psalm 51:3–4: "For I know my transgressions," he sees his sins. He says: "And my sin is ever before me." He sees his sins. And he says, "Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight." He sees himself as sinning against God. He says, "You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge." [He is saying], "I am guilty. *I am guilty.*" True repentance brings [people] to understand that they are sinners and there is a brokenness over their sin. Jesus says in Matthew 5:3–4, again describing the kingdom saint: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." They're broken. They're mourning, [saying], "Oh, I have sinned again against God." You see your poverty. You see how wretched you are. You see the iron bar about ready to drop down on your

neck, and so you flee from the wrath to come, [saying], “I’m getting out of here.” The very ability to recognize that, the volition to escape, is a gift of God’s grace.

Geldenhuis, in his commentary, says:

Real remorse and the unconditional confession of sin are the indispensable requirements for true repentance. The lost one must first realize that he has no right to claim that he should be accepted as a child of God on his own merit. Whosoever desires to go to God, trusting in his own dignity or making excuses instead of confessing his sins openly, is in no condition to receive the forgiveness of God.¹

Notice here that the prodigal is not like Lot’s wife. He’s not looking back, over his shoulder, saying, “Oh, I wish I could go back to that country, that famine-stricken, sin-cursed country. I wish I could go back there and enjoy my sin. I wish I could return to the vomit or to the mire [see 2 Peter 2:22].” He is fed up with that. It is over for him. That whole lifestyle is over for him.

The author of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 12:15–17 these sobering words. “See to it,” he says,

that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

¹Norval Geldenhuis, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, The New International Commentary on the New Testament Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975 [reprint]), p. 408.

You can be plenty sorry and not repentant. You can feel plenty bad and not have true repentance. Esau was sorry, you remind me. Yes, but not repentant. Esau cried, you point out. Yes, but he was not repentant. Esau wanted the blessing of God, but he was not repentant. Esau comes in from the field hungry. He's your typical impetuous young man. As soon as he gets a little hungry, [he says], "I'm dying! Mom, give me something to eat." There his brother is making lunch. Jacob knows his brother. Jacob knows that his brother's god is his appetite, and so he sees an opportunity. This is what we read in Genesis 25:31–34:

But Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." Esau said, "Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?" And Jacob said, "First swear to me"; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Was Esau about ready to die? No. But this is what young men tell you when they're hungry: "I'm dying, Mom. I'm dying. It's been a whole hour [since I ate]." In that one foolish act, Esau valued a bowl of soup more than the everlasting blessing of God Almighty. Later, Jacob tricked his father, Isaac, into giving him the blessing. Jacob deserved the blessing. He, through an oath, received the birthright of the firstborn from his brother for [the price of] a bowl of soup. It was a good deal. But, he didn't go about getting it in the right way. He deceived his father and got the blessing, but then Esau comes in and he wants the same blessing, too. But there is only one, so Esau wept, and Esau cried, and Esau pleaded. Why? Why was he broken? [It is] because he wanted to despise the blessing of God and yet still get the blessing when he wanted it. He wasn't broken before God, he didn't care that he had sinned against a holy God, that he had rejected the everlasting blessing of God. That was nothing. He just wanted his sin and the blessing, too. *That* is not true repentance. That's just an adult temper tantrum.

If this is you, if you're out there saying, "Oh, yeah, I've repented, but I still want my sin," then you haven't repented. That's not repentance. That's just an adult temper tantrum. You're deceived, you're lost, you're headed for hell. You *think* you've repented, but you have not, unless there is a brokenness over sin. True repentance wrought by the grace of God always brings forth brokenness over sin so that you say in your heart, "Against You and You only have I sinned and done what is evil in Thy sight" [see Psalm 51:4].

Four[th]: Repentance turns from sin to Christ. Look at [Luke 15:]18. [The prodigal] says: "I will get up and go to my father," and then later on, at the end of verse 20, he got up and [went] to his father. So, he intended to do it, and he did do it. Having come to his senses, he doesn't wallow in self-pity. He doesn't say, "Well, you know, I guess I'm a sinner. I'm just going to have to stay here and suffer." He's going back to his father. He [says], "Listen, my father is the only one who has ever loved me. My father is the one who has my best interests in mind. I have hurt him, rejected him, despised him, despised my birthright, shamed my family, shamed my culture, [and] shamed my tradition, [but] I'm going back." That is supernatural—to go toward the judge, to go back toward the one that should judge you. Keep in mind that Jesus is speaking to people on the other side of the cross. Then, it was "seek God," now it is "seek Christ." Turn from sin and seek Christ. Don't just feel sorry like Esau [did], or feel sorry like Judas [did] [see Matthew 27:3–5], but feel sorry and be broken over your sin and turn to Jesus Christ in faith.

Paul wrote a very harsh letter to the Corinthians in between what we have [in our Bibles] as 1 and 2 Corinthians. The Corinthian church had so many problems. It was broken. It was in a pagan environment. [Paul] gets there, he establishes this church, there are all these false teachers, and all these people entangled in all these sins and paganism, and trying to grow out of whatever they're trying to grow out of. Paul, then, goes to visit. There are some false teachers there. The false teachers falsely accuse him. No one comes to Paul's defense, and Paul leaves brokenhearted. But after he leaves

brokenhearted, he begins to fester inside. He gets a little righteous zeal; he gets a passion for those people. He wants to see them come around, so he writes the napalm letter. They read it, and it breaks them. They realize, "Oh! We've blown it," and they're broken over their sin.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 7. I want you to see this. This is a verbal interpretation of our parable in some respects in that it shows what true repentance is [as well as] the fruit of it afterward. [In] 2 Corinthians 7:9, Paul [is] explaining what happened after he had drilled [the Corinthian church] with the napalm letter: "I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance." Stop there. Notice there [is] a sorrow that has nothing to do with true repentance and a sorrow that does. [There are] two sorrows: one that leads to repentance, one that doesn't. "For you were made sorrowful according to the will of God," which means there is a sorrow that is *not* according to the will of God. He goes on: "So that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death" [2 Corinthians 7:10].

Notice here there is a kind of sorrow that people regret. [A sorrow that makes them think things like], "I shouldn't have moved out from living with my girlfriend." "I shouldn't have gotten that program on my computer [that] makes me accountable to my friend so he knows what I'm looking at." "I shouldn't have turned my back on this sin or that sin." That is worldly sorrow. That is not true repentance. That is a sorrow with regret, a sorrow of the world that produces death.

But now I want you to notice [2 Corinthians 7:]11. When God's grace invades a person's life and it brings [him] to that repentance according to the will of God, I want you to notice what it produces in [that] person's life. Then think about your [own] life. [Second Corinthians 7:]11 [says]: "For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demon-

strated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.” Do you see that? That is true repentance. The worldly sorrow is a repentance with regret. You wish you hadn't turned from it. You are always longing, looking back, like Lot's wife [see Genesis 19:26; Luke 17:28–32]. You eventually turn back like a dog to its vomit [see 2 Peter 2:22], and you show what you really are.

Now, don't get me wrong here. This doesn't mean that the truly repentant person never sins, but there are some people who say they have repented but keep falling into sin over and over and over again. Then they appease their conscience[s] with a verbal affirmation of what is right, but the pattern of their [lives] is to pursue the things of the world. They will keep going back, keep falling into sin, and yet keep saying, “But, I know I'm forgiven.”

A repentance without regret is what saves you. [Those who truly repent] will never love their sin more than [they love] Christ. They will pursue holiness, [not sin], as a pattern of their [lives]. True godly sorrow has an indignation against sin; a fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom [see Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10]; a longing to obey; a zeal to serve the Lord; a righteous anger toward those things that dishonor God. [That is] true repentance. Listen to what John says in 1 John 2:3–6: “By this we know that we have come to know Him.” Now, if you ever want a statement that is encouraging, it's this: “By this we *know* that we have come to know Him.” Well, tell us John, what is it?

If we keep His commandments. The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

In 1 John 3:21–22, [he continues, saying]: “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we

receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.” Are these statements ambiguous to you? Do these seem like riddles? Are they unclear?

“Oh, I know my son hasn't come to church in a long time, but he's saved.” No. No.

“Well, I know I don't give. I know I don't serve. I know I don't pray. I know I don't read the Bible, but I'm here on most Sundays.” You're deluded. That's not repentance. That's inflammation of the wishbone. Notice what John goes on to say in 1 John 3:7–10. “Little children,” listen to this, “make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous,” notice [that] there is a practice, not a perfection, a practice, “just as he is righteous.”

The one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious.”

[It's a] no brainer. “Anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.” You're not a Christian. I don't care what you call yourself. I don't care how often you come to church. I don't care how philanthropic you are, you're not of God, the Scriptures say. It is clear; it is unambiguous.

Don't call yourself a Christian and yet live in sin all week. If you do so, you are deceived. You have not repented. You have a worldly sorrow that leads to regret. True sorrow makes you forsake your wicked ways [and] unrighteous thoughts and turn to the Lord to find pardon. What will it take for some of you to come to this realization? I know there are people here who have not repented. I've talked to you. You've told me. [With] some of you, it's just obvious. You don't serve. You don't give. You don't do anything.

You're just taking up space. You know what? I'd grant you repentance if I [could], but I can't. You have to pursue God.

You say, "But, Jack, God is the one who gives me that [desire to pursue Him]." Then just be honest with God. At least be honest, and say, "Lord, I don't love You. Lord, I don't want to live for You. Lord, I don't want to keep Your commandments. Lord, I love my sin more than [I do] Christ, but listen, I can't change myself. Save me. Help my unbelief." Do you think God is going to reject a request like that?

[Would He] say, "I don't know. I don't know, he's kind of being honest here. I don't know if I can save somebody like that"? That is the very kind of person that Christ saves. [It is] the only kind of person that Christ saves. But if you sit there in your pride, and [say], "Listen, I go to church most of the time, and I have given a little bit. I read my Bible periodically, and I know I have these sins that never go away in my life, but I'm telling you, I know I'm a Christian," you're far from it.

Fi[fth]: Repentance leads to confession. Look at the middle of [Luke 15:]18. Now [the prodigal] is kind of dialoguing with himself. He has come to his senses. He is broken over his sin. He sees the glories of heaven and the righteousness of God. He wants to go back, and now he is dialoguing in his mind about what he's going to say when he meets up with his dad. He's going to say this: "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight." Again, notice where he sees his primary offense [is against]: heaven. That's where his offense is. "I have sinned against God. I realize I've been sinning against God. Yes, I sinned against you, Dad, but I sinned against God, against heaven, first. Against You and You only have I sinned and done what is evil in Thy sight [see Psalm 51:4]."

Have you ever wondered about that? [You might think], "I thought David committed adultery with Bathsheba first. Didn't he do that? Didn't he try to cover it up with Uriah, bringing him home out of the field, and sin that way, too? Didn't he have Uriah thrust into the forefront of battle and have him murdered? Didn't he sin against him? Didn't he sin against the nation as king in doing this wickedness?" [see 2 Samuel 11]. But what

does [David] pray? “Against You and You only have I sinned” [see Psalm 51:4]. Why? [It is] because when true repentance is granted to a soul, [he] see[s his] offense first and foremost against a holy God, that all the sins [he] commit[s] against other people are a failure to love God and [his] neighbor. And so, [he] just [is] broken, and [he] confess[es] that.

Geldenhuys comments:

He bewails his deep guilt and desires to utter no other words but those of unconditional confession of guilt—the admission that he has sinned against God and against his father—and the entreaty to be received, not as his father’s son, but simply as a hireling.²

He’s broken. He says, “I blew it.” You notice he’s not saying, “It was my wife. It was my husband. You don’t understand the circumstances. My job has so much pressure. Listen, I didn’t get very much sleep last night.” We are so quick to divert away, to try and blame other things [and] other people. That’s not true repentance. True repentance realizes: I’m the bad guy; God is the good guy, and I have sinned against the good guy. True repentance is always a sin-confessing repentance. It doesn’t justify, it doesn’t make excuses, it doesn’t pretend, [saying], “Well, I’m not that bad.” You’re bad, I’m bad, we’re all bad.

This is why John says in 1 John 1:8–9: “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Do you know that? Do you go through every day just confessing your sins, and confessing your sins. Is that the pattern of your life? Do you find that odd, that God would write a Book that would make people aware of their sins and yet [be] drawn to it? Is that weird? [It is like saying], “Here, hit my thumb with the hammer. Come back tomorrow morning and hit my other thumb. Come back [the next] morning and you

²Ibid.

can hit my finger.” Who would read a book like that? Who would read a book that condemns all people, that threatens hell for all people? Who would read a book like that? Who would even go to a book like that? The more you read it, the more convicted you become, don't you? Yeah!

You're thinking, “Man, what is wrong with me? I have to read some more.” The more you read, oh, you long for the days when all you did was smoke, drink, cuss, and chew. Those were the huge sins [you had committed] when you first came to Christ, and you were trying to get over that. But now, what happens? God begins to deal with those heart issues that you didn't even know were there, those deep heart issues, pride, and things in your life, which, by His grace, He didn't show you all at once. Now you see, “I am one black creature. I've got problems, big problems!” You keep reading the Word, and [you think], “Oh, Lord!” You keep reading the Word. Who would do that? I'll tell you who would do that: anybody who has truly repented. [That person is] drawn to the Word. [He] hunger[s] and thirst[s] for righteousness, and [he] say[s], “Lord, I don't care if You use anesthetic or not. Cut it out. Carve [the sin] out of my life.”

The prodigal, having come to true repentance, was willing and wanting to be reconciled to his father. He confesse[d] his sins, and he realize[d], “Listen, man, I'm a wretch, and I'm just going to admit that to my dad.”

Six[th]: Repentance leads to humility. Look at [Luke 15:19]. [The prodigal] says: “ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.” Don't miss the working of God here. Forces unknown to the prodigal have brought him to a place of humility. This is unnatural. To realize that you don't even deserve to be called your father's son because you have sinned against him. If [his father and the rest of the community had] obeyed the Law of Moses, they would have just stoned him to death outside the city.³ But now, saving grace has come upon [the prodigal], and he sees his sin before God [and] before his father, and in

³See the transcription of the 01/25/08 sermon entitled “The Prodigal's Suffering from Sin,” available at: <http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/Sermons.aspx/text/sermon/2009/20090125.htm>

humility, he is going to go back to his father, and he's going to say, "Can you just give me a job? You don't need to call me your son. You don't need to be nice to me, or anything. I'll sleep out in the field, or whatever, but if you could just treat me as a day laborer, I [would] really appreciate it." This is what true humility is, and it is what is produced by true repentance. It is that acknowledgment that you don't deserve salvation, forgiveness of sins, God's love, [and] all those things that God did for you when you were too clueless to even know He was doing them.

J.C. Ryle says:

The person in whose heart a true work of the Holy Spirit has begun will never be content with thinking and resolving. He will break off from sin. He will cease to do evil; He will learn to do good. He will turn to God in humble prayer.⁴

There is a true humility that always accompanies true repentance, and if you don't have that in your life, you haven't repented. It has to be there. True repentance is a gift of God, and it humbles us.

Yesterday I was attending a memorial service for a friend of the family that had died. One of the hymns they were singing was "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing." I [was] singing with all the people, and my mind was wandering until I got [to] these couple lines, and I thought, "That is the whole sermon I'm preaching tomorrow. That's the whole thing in a couple verses." As I read this, I want you to think [about] how perfectly this matches the parable of the prodigal son and God's salvation of any lost sinner. First, [the song shows] what happens before they come to their senses.

Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God,
He, to rescue me from danger
Bought me with His precious blood.

⁴J.C. Ryle, *The Gospel of Luke*, Luke 15. Available at: <http://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/115.htm>.

That's what God does before we even have a clue. Then, once we are saved, once He grants us repentance, and we are born again, then:

O, to grace how great a debtor,
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, as a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love.
Here's my heart, O take and seal it—
Seal it for Thy courts above.⁵

Anyone who is truly repentant knows that to be true. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your mercy and grace. We thank You for Your truth. Father, I think of how good You [were] to us, when we were clueless and we didn't even know anything about what was going on. You chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world [see John 17:24; Ephesians 1:4]. You drew us to Christ. You granted us repentance. You gave us faith. You opened our hearts to the truth. You orchestrated circumstances so that we would be able to hear the gospel. And then, in granting us that repentance, we were broken over our sin, we hunger[ed] after heaven, we confess[ed] our sins, we [were] humbled. And, Father, we see You working in our lives, and Father, we just want to praise You. We want to thank You for saving us because we couldn't save ourselves because we were just lost. And yet, You brought us to our senses, You turned us around, and You drew us by the cords of love to Christ. Father, if there is anybody here this morning who has never truly repented of [his or her] sin, who doesn't know Christ, who is deceived and deluded, [who] doesn't hunger and thirst for righteousness, [who] doesn't confess [his or her] sins, [who] has a worldly sorrow of regret, who isn't really broken, oh, Father, break [him or her] this

⁵Robert Robinson, "Come, Thou Fount," *Voices in Worship* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 2003), #280.

morning. Help [him or her] to see the danger [he or she is] in, and may [he or she] flee from the wrath to come. May [he or she] flee from the Judge to the Savior. And, Father, may You grant [him or her] that and may [he or she], in receiving that, praise You for all eternity. We pray in Christ's name, Amen.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture is taken from the New American Standard Bible[®], ©1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995, by The Lockman Foundation.