



October 16, 2022 ~ The Flame of Repentance

OPEN

Theologian Henry Thiessen (*Lectures in Systematic Theology*, W. B. Eerdmans, 1949, 269) explains that “*Repentance is essentially a change of mind...It has, however, three aspects: and intellectual, an emotional, and a volitional aspect....This implies a change of view...a change of feeling...a change of will, disposition, and purpose.*”

“*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near*” was the central message of Jesus’ earthly ministry (Matthew 4:17). God longs for “*everyone to come to repentance*” (II Peter 3:8-9). It is through repentance and faith that we are restored to a vital relationship with God.

In a way, our current series **Ignite: learning to live ablaze for God** is a “heart check” to determine our need of repentance. This question we have been asking – “am I on fire for God – answered honestly, will reveal our need to enter an intellectual, emotional, and volitional change of direction?”

From the example of several Bible characters, we have been observing that God desires to ignite our hearts with greater passion for Him than we ever thought possible. Though this is something only God can **produce**, we must choose to **participate**. We have illustrated this through the **fire tetrahedron**.

Oxygen – consuming indwelling – Acts 1,2

Fuel – transforming encounter – Luke 24:32-35

Heat – passionate zeal – Romans 12:11

Reaction – gifted service – II Timothy 1:6

Perhaps one of the greatest ways we participate in God’s grace is through the **flame of repentance** in response to the Word of God! Consider one unusual story of repentance found in **Ezra 10:1-17**. As we consider Ezra’s role in modelling and facilitating repentance, a process emerges. Ezra came from Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem about sixty years after a remnant had returned and rebuilt the Temple and restored Passover. However, in those years, God’s people had slipped back into sinful patterns (see 9:1). So, God used Ezra to lead the people back to Himself in repentance (see 7:8-10).

DIG

[A] Repentance involves conviction

Romans 2:4 teaches us that it is God’s **kindness** which leads us to repent. How does this happen? The Holy Spirit **convicts** which leads to an **acknowledgement** of our sin that includes emotions. Ezra articulated the failures of God’s people and involved himself passionately in owning the sin (9:6). This is where we see the deep emotional component of repentance. Ezra tore his clothes, plucked his hair, fell on his knees (9:3-5); he wept, prostrated himself (10:1); fasted, mourned (10:4).

This conviction upon Ezra came upon others – notably Shecaniah – who also identified the failure of Israel to keep themselves separated unto God (10:2). When conviction is real – not just “crocodile tears” – there is a deep “cutting” of the heart with the realization that one is **disobedient** and therefore **distant** from God. This is what occurred in Acts 2:37 at Pentecost when Peter spoke to those who had rejected Jesus – “*they were pierced to the heart*”.

[B] Repentance involves confession

Just awareness or sadness over sin is not repentance. The Holy Spirit enables us to **confess** which means to agree with God’s view of our sin. Repentance occurs as we authentically turn from the sin and turn to God. In ***A Long Obedience in the Same Direction***, (IVP, 2000, 29,33) Eugene Peterson describes repentance as “*a rejection that is also an acceptance, a leaving that develops into an arriving, a no to the world that is a yes to God.*” Concerning what sin did Ezra and company agree with God?

Bible commentator John A. Martin (*Bible Knowledge Commentary OT*, Victor, 1985, 669-670) notes that “*Foreign marriages contaminated Israel, fostered the foreigners’ prosperity, weakened Israel spiritually, and decreased her opportunity to enjoy the land’s crops.*”

In other words, entering covenants with those outside Israel corrupted the covenant God had established with His people. Leviticus 18 identified gross immorality common in the nations surrounding Israel and forbade following such practices. And Deuteronomy 18:9-12 helps us understand that to marry a foreign wife was a gateway to embracing and normalizing a pagan lifestyle.

[C] Repentance involves change

What changed under Ezra’s leadership? What was the “fruit of repentance” (see Matthew 3:8)? An investigation was begun (vv.16-17) which resulted in sending the foreign women out of Israel. Repentance is fundamentally about rejecting a sinful direction in favor of a godly path.

This is the spirit of one passage from our Cornerstone Bylaws, which addresses the matter of “church discipline”.

When further discipline of church members is necessary, as an expression of the members’ care for one another and for the body of Christ, its object shall be the correction and leading of individual members to repentance with a clear view to their full restoration to fellowship within the body and the protection of the spiritual life and testimony of the corporate body of the church within the community.

In his book **Loving God** Charles Colson gives three reasons why “*repentance [is] so seldom preached and so little understood.*” (95) Let’s consider these for a moment and how they impact us.

1. **The appeal of modern evangelism is not for repentance but for enlistment** – this is a great observation. How often are we focused on greater number of decisions for Jesus? Instead, we should be focused on a true repentance and faith.
2. **Unwillingness to accept the reality of personal sin and need to repent** – in Ezra 10:3-4 we read about “covenant” “responsibility” “act[ing]”. We live in a secularized culture in which one’s personal happiness has become the highest goal, avoiding accountability to God.
3. **Our culture has written sin out of existence** – disobedience to God has been reasoned away in many ways in our society. Two Canadian examples: [MAiD laws expanding](#) [Prolife groups restricted](#)

Any action resulting from repentance must be Gospel driven and Christ focused. If it is not, then we merely become moral crusaders. There must be hope...not just complaint or condemnation. In Ezra 10:2 we read, “*there is hope for Israel in spite of this.*” Amy Carmichael offered this prayer,

*Spirit Divine, work in me holiness, purity, pity for the world's distress
But Oh let hope, Thy quenchless hope, prevail, lest I should faint and fail
Then as the incense from the golden bowl rose up to Thee, so from my quiet soul
Let prayer arise – a little, quiet cloud – to Thee, my listening God*

REFLECT

The purpose of repentance is authentic transformation, not merely an outward, tradition-based act. How do you approach repentance in your walk with Jesus? Is it something that you do mechanically? Or do you work through meaningful steps of conviction, confession, and change?

Consider this story from English history.

The St Scholastica Day riot took place [over three days] in Oxford, England...February 1355...when two students complained about the quality of wine served to them in the Swindlestock Tavern...The students quarreled with

the taverner; the argument quickly escalated to blows. The inn's customers joined in on both sides, and the resulting melee turned into a riot...Around 30 townsfolk were killed, as were up to 63 members of the university...[among other fines and penalties] an annual penance was imposed on the town: each year, on St Scholastica's Day, the mayor, bailiffs and sixty townspeople were to attend a Mass at the University Church of St Mary the Virgin for those killed [which took place until 1955] [read more](#)

When Jesus invited repentance, it was a call into His Kingdom of grace. All of this had been portrayed by God’s commands. Yet Israel had turned His commands into oppressive human efforts. God had provided the Law as a divine sin diagnosis in order to lead us to freedom and forgiveness in Christ.

For further prayer and reflection...read through **Galatians 5:1-25**

- *How does this passage describe the freedom found in Jesus Christ?*
- *What does this text teach us about a new life in the Spirit?*
- *Are there any sinful patterns mentioned in this passage for which you need to repent?*