



The Nature and Necessity of True Repentance

January 25, 2026

2 Corinthians 7:10-11

(Video 57:48)

That was Claire Kesto and Naomi Hone, thank you, ladies. As you know, we have been in a study of the book of Romans, but like I said in my opening remarks, this is an unusual Sunday in the sense that we always celebrate the Lord's table and communion on the last Sunday of the month. But it's the first Sunday of the new year in which we're getting the opportunity to do that. And, and I can't remember this ever happening before, it's also the Sunday right before a following Sunday, next Sunday, when we are going to have our baptism service. So I'm going to leave for the next couple of weeks our study in Romans chapter 15 and talk about something that I believe is obviously not only an appropriate conduit into celebrating the Lord's table, but also baptism next week. And I hope it's a blessing to all of you as well. I know one thing, it's critically, critically important.

The most chilling conversation I believe I've ever had in my life, with regards to this subject at least, occurred right there, right next to where Teri is sitting right now, on that pew, a little over five years ago. I had an individual approach me, an individual that I've known for at least 35, 40 plus years at the time. An individual whose name was from the time we moved to Arizona in 1981 was synonymous with evangelical Christian circles. And Scottsdale Bible Church and the ministries that flew out of, grew out of that church. And Scottsdale Christian Academy and things at the seminary and just on and on and on. And this individual out of nowhere approached me and said, John, you know, I really appreciate you and nice things. But I have, and the exact phrase was, "I have a bone to pick with you." An old-time phrase for, I got a problem. Well, what's that? Well, I appreciate the fact that, you know, when you preach



the gospel and, but she said, you always say, a person can't get into a right relationship with Christ unless they've repented of their sins and asked Him to forgive them of their sins and come into their life. And I want you to know something. I've never felt the need to do that. I said, really? I was really taken aback. And we said, I said, let's talk about that. We sat down and we talked about it. And I said, well, I've just always, this individual said, I've always sensed the presence of God in my life. I've always known God. I've always known about Jesus. And I said, well, yeah, I understand that. Almighty God's word is very clear. Man is born with a knowledge of Almighty God. We're made in the image and likeness of God. Man knows in his heart there's a God. He has to suppress the truth there's a God as he matures in unrighteousness. All men know in their heart of hearts there's a God. Oh, no. I mean, I just have always known. I said, well, okay. I said, but at some point in time, you gave your life to Christ by acknowledging your sin and repenting and entrusting your heart to Him. No. I said, well, I kept pushing at it. Okay, well, maybe you can't remember a specific time or day or whatever. But somewhere along the line, in the last 60, this individual was almost 80 years old at the time. Somewhere along the line, in all the preaching and all the teachings, obviously, the thought got to you. The concept got to you. God is holy. You're a sinner. He came to die on a cross to pay the penalty for your sin. You accept the free gift of salvation by repenting of your sin. And so, somewhere along the line, you got the point and gave your life to Christ. I have never sensed the need to ever repent of my sins. And this individual would have none of it. That person died a couple years later. And I have grave concerns about where that individual is today.

And to a certain extent, that person was a victim of an errant, aberrant theology, which was attempted to be shoved down my throat and many others in seminary as well. This concept that repentance is not an aspect of the gospel. If you tell people they need to repent of their



sins to come to Christ, other than to just believe, you're adding works to the gospel. That is absolutely not true and is absolutely unbiblical. I think Spurgeon said it best. You look at the salvific experience not as a series of items that happen in sequence as much as the spokes on a wheel. And repentance, a godly sorrow for your sin and a desire to seek forgiveness of it, is absolutely integral to the gospel.

Now, some of you sit here and you say, well, this is going to be a very important message for that one or two individuals here or looking online or might hear this someday who don't know Christ as their Lord and Savior. So, I'm really happy John's going through that for them. No, resist the temptation to do that because repentance is absolutely an aspect of yours and my daily walk with Christ and is an aspect not just to our salvation/justification but is an aspect of our salvation/sanctification.

Turn, if you will, over to 2 Corinthians 7. 2 Corinthians 7. As you do, I want to underscore to you, now that person's problem was she didn't see the need for repentance at all. There's another huge deception that floats around in Christendom. And this is going to hit you and me more than perhaps the other. There's a frightening possibility. You can cry over your sin. You can be deeply moved in a service. You can walk forward at the end of a hymn or a song at the end of a service or an event. You can soak your Bible with tears and still never actually repent of your sins. It's not being broken in the moment, one man says. It's do you change in the week that follows. There's a deathly cycle. There's a—you stumble and you fall. You commit sin. Then you, oh, you make a promise to God, I'll never do that again. And then you reform, and you think you reform, but you go back to the old patterns and the old ways, and then you stumble and fall again, and you keep repeating this cycle over and over again. *One man said this, the sin returns like a familiar visitor, and you open the door. Because in truth, you never moved out of the house where it lives. You've grown—Spurgeon says this— you've grown*



fluent in sorrow, but you're still a stranger to repentance. One man put it this way. There's a type of sorrow that produces a weeping without killing a single sin. This kind of false repentance is not a minor weakness. It's a deadly self-deception. It convinces you that because you feel convicted, you must be changing. You mistake pain for progress. You mistake emotion for conversion. You mistake a trembling moment for a transformed life. How many late-night prayers have you uttered? Never again. How many promises have you made to Almighty God? How many emotional worship movements have you made without any real change in your habits, in your boundaries, in your conduct, without any real change in the choices that you make in secret? The problem is not that God's grace is weak. The problem is that our repentance is not real. It's not a real repentance.

Well, I hope you got to 2 Corinthians chapter 7. I need to do the same thing. Why? Because the Word of God underscores this big time, and I wanted to underscore it for you as well. 2 Corinthians chapter 7, Paul has written to the Hebrews, and he has confronted them in some of their sin, and they've responded to it. I won't go into the entire background of it, but just pick it up at verse 9. 2 Corinthians 7:9. ***I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful...*** you see, sorrowful in and of itself isn't the issue. He says, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful ***...to the point of repentance;*** What's repentance, by the way? *Metanoia* (G3341), it's a 180-degree change. It's a total change of direction, total change of mind and direction. We're going to get to that in a moment. ***For you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the,*** here's the part, just, for ***the sorrow,*** verse 10, ***that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret...*** Meaning what? You'll never be sorry for it. You'll never regret it. You'll never regret a godly repentance for your sins. He says, it produces a repentance without regret, ***leading to salvation,***... Now, the word *leading* there in the New



American Standard is in italics, okay? That means it's not in the actual text. It's not a bad translation, but it's not a complete one. It leads to salvation justification, but it also, what it actually, the text really says is a repentance without regret, a repentance which is in the realm of salvation. Why am I emphasizing that? Because there's a godly sorrow that leads to a genuine repentance, that leads a non-believer to a saving faith in Christ, salvation/justification. But, there's a godly sorrow that leads a genuine believer to true repentance, and therefore greater holiness, a salvation/sanctification. See, don't get caught up. Remember the three-fold aspect of salvation. Salvation past: justification. Salvation present: ongoing sanctification, growth and holiness, conformity to Christ, etc. Salvation glorification: to come. You've got to always think of all three of them when you see that word. So, this has direct application to the believer. You and I cannot be more and more conformed to the image of Christ unless we understand what a genuine repentance for our sin really is and break that cycle of stumble, fall, make promises, go back to the old patterns, stumble, fall, make promises, go back to the old patterns, and on and on and on and on and on. This deadly cycle. So, in 2 Corinthians 7:10, we clearly see there's a sorrow according to the will of God that produces a repentance without regret leading to salvation/justification, leading to salvation/sanctification, ultimately leading to salvation/glorification. **...but the sorrow of the world produces death.** What's death? Separation from God. Separation from God in your earthly walk. Separation from God forever in a real place called hell unless you experience that genuine godly sorrow.

Say, why? So, there's obviously, what I want to say, there's obviously two kinds of sorrow. There's a worldly sorrow and a godly sorrow. One produces a genuine repentance, which we're going to talk about. Again, repentance, *metanoia*, 180-degree change, a total change of direction. Now, what really hurt this one individual I talked about, although her, she'd just



gotten seared over to the gospel, but for years and years and years, this individual sat under a teaching that talking repentance wasn't even an issue, wasn't even necessary. And for the life of me, this verse of Scripture shoots that down to me forever. But let me give you a few. 2 Timothy 2:25. Timothy is encouraged by Paul to keep preaching the Word of God, and he says of some of the unbelievers, ***God may grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.*** As a matter of fact, just so you, how you could ever think that repentance was not a part of the gospel is amazing. I'm telling you, I sat nine straight seminary hours under a man who absolutely hammered home this, the error that repentance was not a part of it. And the damage that philosophy and that aberrant theology has done across Christendom is amazing. It's leading people astray. Go to Acts chapter 2 real quick. I'm going to walk you through this. It's worth it. Acts chapter 2. In Acts chapter 2, the first sermon of all of them on Pentecost, Peter stands up on Pentecost. In Acts chapter 2:37 & 38, he pounds out the gospel. You, my godless men, have nailed Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, God come in human form to the cross, et cetera, et cetera. Well, they're pricked to the core. They're convicted of their sin and so forth. Look at verse 37. ***Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"*** Well, what did he say? Just believe? No. ***Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for (or on because of) the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*** Turn over to Acts chapter 3. Right across the page, verse 19. What was the message? Verse 18. ***But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent, therefore, and return, that your sins may be wiped away...*** What's he talking about? He's talking about salvation/justification. That your sins may be wiped away ***...in order that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;*** Flip over to Acts chapter 5:31.



I'll give you a little context. Verse 30. He's preaching again. ***The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. He, Jesus, is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel.***

Repentance is not a work. Repentance is a gift as a part of the faith package that the Spirit of God gives a soul that's under conviction for their sin at the time they come to know Christ. It's a part of the faith experience, if you will. It's the heart attitude of godly sorrow that accompanies a genuine conversion. If you didn't come to Christ in that way, you have never come to Christ. I talked to this individual and I said, well, wait a minute. I know Jesus, they said. I know Jesus. Well, I know one thing. You need to know Him as Savior. And to know him as Savior, you have to have something to be saved from. And what did He save you from? He saved you from the penalty for your sins, Hell. And therefore, you have to be a sinner on your way to Hell to be saved from the hell you're going to. You have to have an awareness of that. And so, you can... look, Judas knew Christ. He didn't know Him as his Savior. Satan knows Christ. He doesn't know Him as his Savior. The terminology gets all bollocksed up. It's amazing to me. Flip over to Acts chapter 11:18. What's it say? 11:18. This is Peter talking now about the Gentiles have come to know Christ. And the Jews he's talking to were stunned. You mean even the Gentiles are in on this? Look at verse 18. ***When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."*** I thought it was faith in Jesus Christ that leads to life. Repentance and faith are used synonymously in many verses in the salvific transaction. Flip over to Acts chapter 20. I'll give you a couple more just because it's... just because. Acts chapter 20:21. I think it is. Yeah. Paul talking here. ***Solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*** Repentance is the opposite side of the faith coin. They're two sides of the same coin. And what did we say? Good



grief even in our own study in the book of Romans. Romans chapter 2:4. ***Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing, that the kindness of God leads you to repentance.*** Repentance is a part of the salvific transaction.

Oh, well there were two things that were rammed at us. Okay, fine. First of all, first concept, there's no need for repentance at all to be saved. And in conjunction with that, to repent, it's just merely a change of mind. It's just changing your mind about who Jesus is. You'll hear this on some Christian radio programs to this day. Both of those statements are total error. It's not a change of mind about who Jesus is. And it's got everything to do with your sin. How do you know? Well, quite frankly, the verses we're looking at 2 Corinthians chapter 7, and you want to go back there. 2 Corinthians chapter 7:10, I think just nails it completely. Basically, the repentance that leads to salvation is defined as a being sorry, not just having a new idea about Jesus Christ, or getting some new information about who Christ is. The Corinthians had been confronted about their sin. They'd been called to repent. So, in 2 Corinthians [7], notice he goes on in verse 11. 2 Corinthians 7, verse 11. ***For behold, what earnest...*** By the way, you're going to see the word what, W-H-A-T, seven times in this verse. It's used as a comparative. He doesn't say, ***for behold***, earnestness in this very thing. This godly sorrow has produced in you. Behold, vindication of your... No, it's always *what*. ***What earnestness***. It's a comparative. It means wow. It's not just earnestness. It's ***what earnestness***. It's not just vindication. It's ***what vindication of yourselves***. Look at this. It's not just indignation. He says, ***what indignation***. He doesn't just say fear. He says, ***what fear***. He doesn't say longing. He says, ***what longing***. He doesn't say zeal. He says, ***what zeal***. He doesn't say avenging of wrong. He says, ***what avenging of wrong! In everything, you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter***. Now, that takes some unpacking. Brian was saying that memory



verse took a little difficulty because of the way the text was worded. So does this. The word there, innocent, *hagnos* (G53), it means purity. What he's saying is this: *You people were really in sin. I wrote you a letter and I confronted you in your sinfulness. And to show the genuineness of your desire for purity, to show how innocent your heart is before the Lord now, you've responded. You've responded with a godly sorrow that has led to a genuine repentance.* And by the way, how do I know it's a real godly sorrow? What's the attitude that accompanies this genuine godly sorrow and repentance? He gives you seven of them right there that they exemplify right there in verse 11.

What are they? He says, ***what earnestness***. The word earnestness there has a hasten to it. It means to do something quickly. It's a diligence. It means you want to set it right immediately. You don't want to delay. You have a godly sorrow for your sin. And so you don't want to delay. He says, ***what vindication of yourselves***. Vindication, that means to try to declare yourself innocent. That's not what he means here. He said, what vindication of yourself. It's the word *apologia* (G627), it means to clear your name; to have a good name. It means you quickly want to restore your good name of Christ that you carry. And then he says, ***what indignation***. Like I can remember my father-in-law talking about a passage in James. He says, I will be angry so as not to sin. Therefore, I'll be angry at nothing but my own sin. We use that phrase *righteous indignation*. It says, you have a hatred for your sin. Most people say they are experiencing repentance or have a sorrow. They're sorry for the consequences. They're sorry for the guilt they feel. They're sorry for the shame they might experience. They're sorry that they might get exposed publicly. But not a sorrow for what they've done to the heart of Christ who died on a cross and loves them so. One of the reasons why it's so important that we always return to the Lord's table and focus on the cross of Christ is like Spurgeon says, the one thing that will cause you to quit looking inside at your own self-pity and start gradually loosening that



vice grip that you have on your sins that you want to go back to like a dog returning to your vomit is to look what you've done to the Savior who loves you so. Who has to cry out and say, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Your sin and mine caused him to say that. Your sin and mine put him on that cross. Looking into the heart of a God who literally would condescend to become the creature and die on your behalf. I mentioned it in my prayer a moment ago. I can't remember what Puritan quoted it, but it's one of my favorite quotes about this. *How black must be the stain of your sin and mine that it took nothing less than the blood of God Himself, His very own son, to wash it away.* You start focusing on that instead of your image and your reputation and what will people think. And you'll have a genuine, humble admission of your sin.

And one of the first things we're called upon to do, he says, is to have an unabashed honesty. Drag your sin out before God and admit it. And tell Him you're sorry for it. I'm very thankful to my wife, Teri, for many reasons. Oh, I have a tendency to exaggerate. No, you don't, John. You're a liar. It's a lie. Call it what it is. And by the way, you don't have a genuine repentance if you don't have a heart that wants to change. Turn off the apps. Shut off the computer. Cancel the subscription. My father-in-law's old analogy. You got a problem with alcohol? Quit renting an apartment above a liquor store. Move. Take steps to deal with your sin. If your hand offends you, what's he say? If your right hand offends you, cut it off. He's not talking about self-mutilation. He's not talking about doing yourself personal harm. He's talking about the radical spiritual surgery that needs to take place in your life and mine to start living lives of personal holiness. You're engaging in a false repentance. And it's deceptive. He says, **what fear?** Fear of what? Fear of God? Yes. Fear of God and how so? Fear that you love God so much that you might hurt Him again. It's actually an aspect of worship. He says in verse 11, **what longing.** The word longing there, *epithēsis* (G1972), in the Greek word it basically is a



longing because you had a relationship, a companionship, a fellowship, and it's gone, and you want it back. That's the longing. It's that relationship with God. You want that thing to be right with God. He says, **what zeal**. Just as you wanted to vindicate your own name and bearing the name of Christ, you have a zeal for the name of God. It's a jealousy towards the holiness of God saying, I don't want to do this to the God who loves me so ever again. Oh God, by your grace, enable me to do so. You have a problem with anger? Quit saying I have an anger problem. Start telling God you're committing the sin of anger. Tell God you've got a judgmental spirit and you refuse to forgive and put your tongue and your heart under the discipline of the Holy Spirit of God by making it a matter of regular prayer. You've got a particular issue, maybe you need to have a believer who's a solid believer who loves you more than your image that you can share your weakness with and that they can hold you accountable. Lastly, he says, avenging wrong. **What avenging of wrong**. What's he talking about? Set it right. If you owe restitution to somebody, "Oh God, I'm sorry I did that." That may not be enough. You may have to pay financially. You may need to just go and apologize. You may need to just go and sit down and say, you know what? I've held something against you for so long. I've had a bitter critical spirit. But it's affected my whole attitude towards you. I'm so sorry. I've asked God to forgive me, but I want you to forgive. Whatever it might be, there's an earnest, that is genuine, godly sorrow.

Repentance. I'm going to give you the three C's. One, *confession*. We've already talked about it. Name the sin before God. I don't exaggerate. It's a lie. I don't struggle with so-and-so. But no, you're into whatever. Call it what it is. The second C, *cut off the access*. As one commentator said, delete, blank, cancel, return, move, apologize, restore, whatever. Cut off the access to committing those sins again. And then thirdly, *continue*. Continue walking with God.



I hate Christianese. Okay, what does that mean? Continue walking with God. Let me give you five of them. Five key ingredients of it. One is *prayer*. Having a regular time with Almighty God, set aside every day, as surely as you have an appointment with a client, or an appointment with a dentist, an appointment with God. Second of all, that involves the Word of God. *Ingesting the Word of God* on a regular basis in your life. Third, *godly fellowship*. Carving out time with people who take the Word of God seriously, who are striving in holiness, and who are going to make you a better man or woman of Christ, and not drag you down. Fourth, *humbly use your spiritual and natural giftedness to serve* others in the body of Christ. When you're focusing on serving others, it will enrich your faith, it will encourage your walk with the Lord, and it is used as a means of God's grace as an additional armament against your own falling into sin. Because when you see God use you, it just emboldens and strengthens your faith. And fifth, *share your faith in Jesus Christ* with as many others as God gives you the opportunity to do so. Because that will do the same. And by the way, what are you doing? You're fulfilling your mandate as ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You're reconciling the lost to Christ, and you're stimulating those in the body of God to love and good deeds.

If the men who are going to serve us communion would please come forward now, I just wanted to underscore as they do so, some real key points in this whole concept of repentance. I mentioned Judas a moment ago. They are an absolute case study in the wrong and right way. By the way, if you're watching, Hi Sammy Statini, if you're watching today, I visited Sammy Statini yesterday, and we talked about those two thieves on either side of the cross, Sammy. And I will tell you, the one thief who doesn't come to know Christ and Judas are two of the most pathetic people in all the scriptures to me. One guy is three feet away from the Savior of the world, hanging on a cross himself, about to die. The other guy on the other side gets it, he



sees Him, and still, that guy dies and rejects Him. And then, of course, Judas. You can't be closer to Jesus Christ than Judas and not know Him. Judas and Peter both denied Christ. Judas and Peter both wept bitterly. One, Judas, he threw, even gave the money back. His steps led to a noose, and he hung himself. He looked inward. Peter, by God's grace, responded by going to the Savior. It was not the direction of their tears, it was the direction of their feet that led. The devil does not fear our tears. He fears our obedience. So as the elements are about to be distributed, yeah, I want the Holy Spirit of God to convict all of us of our sinfulness and particular sins, and I hope that you will be prompted by the Spirit of God to, in your heart of hearts, name every one of them. But just as important as acknowledge them, by God the Holy Spirit's power, you need to commit to taking action. Don't be moved, be mobilized, taking concrete steps to not repeat those same sin patterns again. Men, service the elements.

The prodigal in Luke 15 says he was in the pig pen. Feeling bad, as he should. Feeling remorse, feeling guilt, maybe having tears as he should. But he didn't stay there. He broke the cycle. Scripture says he came to himself; came to his senses, and he got up and he went to the father. And he didn't find a father tapping his foot and looking at his watch prepared to give him a lecture. Father came running to him, found a running father and a robe and a ring and a regal repast. The same God that convicts us of our sin, the same God who wants us to have that godly sorrow, is ready also to quickly forgive us of that sin. Jesus says ***"Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I'll give you..."*** another set of rules to live by. No, ***"Come unto me all you are weary and heavy laden, and I'll give you rest."*** Friend that rest you're looking for is the rest from the torture of trying to keep living the double life you're living. The hypocritical polished churchianity on Sunday and the real you throughout the rest of the week. Jesus has returned. Some of you may be coming to Him for the first time. That's the whole important it's the reason why he wants us to go through this ritual. That night before



He was crucified He takes His men aside, you know what the scriptures say, most of you. He said broke the bread He gave it to them, He says, "This is My body which is given for you" symbolically talking about what was going on in the Christ and actually symbolically talking about His 33 years of righteousness. So when you come to this ordinance, yeah we come with a heart of gratitude thankful for what we've done, but it's also with a heart of repentance. A sorrow even for the sins we've confessed that have been forgiven that we have a freedom from, those sins still put the Savior on a cross and as long as we live in this body of flesh sad to say we're still going to stumble, we're going to fall, we're going to cry, we're going to make a promise. But we don't have to go back to our old patterns. He said, ***"This is My body which is given for you;"*** as often as you go through this ritual as often as you do this He says ***"do this in remembrance of Me"***. Let's remember the body of our Savior Jesus Christ. Scriptures also say that in similar fashion He took the cup, and saying this is the cup of a new and an everlasting covenant, promise, commitment, that I'm making with you. I won't drink of this fruit of the vine until I drink it with you anew on that one great glorious day in My Father's kingdom, but as long as you do this, do so in remembrance of Me. The bread (the wafer, the cracker) reminding us of our gratitude, reminding us of our commitment. But the grape juice reminding us of what it cost God for our salvation. Let's remember the atoning work of God in the person of Christ at Calvary's cross.

Father as Brian comes to lead us in this closing hymn, we commit ourselves to You anew. Lord this cycle of a false repentance, of a sorrow that is self-centered and is not a godly sorrow, we pray Father that real evidence of a godly sorrow will appear in all of our lives when we see ourselves by Your grace taking concrete steps to guard against such sins in the future. Father by Your grace enable each of us to do so. We ask it again in the name of Yourself, in the person of Jesus our Christ. And all God's people said amen and amen.

