

## “Repenting”

*Lent 2019 - “With All Your Heart” – part #3*

### *1 Corinthians 10:1-13*

I like to think that my parents raised me well. I have never had my leg broken because a hay wagon ran over me. Are you surprised? Well, that happened to my mom when she was a child, so I’m pretty sure one of the things she taught me was not to play under hay wagons, especially when they are moving!

There were many things my parents told me not to do. As I grew older, I realized that many of those warnings came from my parents’ first-hand experiences. Still, I have made a lot of my own unique mistakes, like wrecking my Ford Bronco on black ice. That’s the reality of life – you can impart wisdom and character to your children, but chances are, they will also have to learn from their own mistakes.

I am teaching my children now so that they can benefit from my experiences. Maybe my children won’t crash their cars on black ice – they will probably have self-driving cars! But they will have their own experiences and make their own mistakes.

Can I ask you this morning, what did your parents teach you? Why? What was their motivation? Was it an effort to correct your behavior? To help you be successful? Avoid jail time? To help you live a life that honors God?

More often than not, we read the news about something terrible that happened – some corruption or abuse scandal – and we vow to ourselves, “I’ll never do that!” And yet we overlook the things we do that offend God just as

badly. We need a different perspective, a view of the big picture to bring us back into a right relationship with God.

We need the season of Lent. Lent is about preparing our whole hearts to return to God. It is traditionally a time when we examine ourselves, our thoughts and our actions, and make some needed adjustments. Through God’s Word, the Holy Spirit can correct our behavior, so that we are not doomed to repeat history.

In the scripture we just read, Paul talks at great length to his fellow Jesus-followers in Corinth about some bad behavior and habits they had adopted. They desperately need discipline and introspection. They also need to return to God with their whole hearts.

Corinth was a thriving trade city located on an isthmus in Greece. It was a prosperous city, at the intersection of trade routes over land and sea. Imagine the delight of the sailors landing in a port town after a long trip. Corinth was probably the equivalent of Panama today.

Romans had conquered and rebuilt Corinth. In Paul’s time, around 51 CE, it was just over 100 years old, but was five times as large as Athens. It had a prominent history. Ancient Corinth had been the richest port and the largest city in ancient Greece.<sup>1</sup>

The trouble in the Corinthian church was directly due to the influence of all these travelers converging in one spot, not only seeking pleasure, but also trying to maximize their profit. You know how everything seems expensive in Niagara Falls? That’s because it is. It’s a destination with a reputation. So was Corinth. They had Greek, Roman, Egyptian, and other cultures influencing them. Corinth had dozens of temples to all sorts of gods and goddesses, not the least of which

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<sup>1</sup> [www.abrock.com/Greece-Turkey/corinth.html](http://www.abrock.com/Greece-Turkey/corinth.html)

was the infamous Aphrodite. And in the midst of this was a fledgling Christian church trying to make it.

Paul’s approach was one of a parent guiding his children. In this letter, Paul did rebuke the church, but he also guided them with wisdom. In chapter 10, Paul basically says, “Look at the history of the Israelites in the desert!” Paul pointed out what many of these weary travelers did under Moses’ leadership. They grumbled. They complained. They worshiped false gods, like the golden calf. They complained about the manna and the quail. They complained about not having enough water. Step by step, as Moses tried to lead them to the Promised Land, they fought and complained amongst themselves, like grumpy children in the back seat of the car on the way to the falls. “When are we going to get there? It’s too hot. I’m hungry. Blah, blah, blah.”

Look, Paul says, God was not pleased with the Hebrews. As a result of their sin, they suffered plagues, snakes, and rebellion. For forty years, they wandered in the desert until their bodies were “scattered.” Not cool, says Paul.

So, why bring this up? Are we heading into a desert? Maybe not literally, but Paul noted that these events in Israel’s past were warnings for us all not to disobey God. “So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall,” writes Paul. (1 Cor 10:12, my emphasis on the “you”.) Israel really did think that they were standing firm. But when they were tested, the results showed the true character of their hearts.

Maybe the Corinthians thought their battles were worse. But Paul clearly pointed out that no temptation (or trial or test) had seized them except what is common to everyone. (1 Cor 10:13) In other words, we all go through the same

stuff, just on different days! No one has an excuse, no one gets an exception. We are all sinners, we all need grace.

So where is this going? The point I want to make hinges on the end of verse 13. "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

God will provide a way out of temptation, tests, and trials. What is that way? Repentance. Repentance is a fancy word for turning around and going the other direction. If we are to make the most of Lent and the chance we have to look inside ourselves, we need to repent. Paul makes the case that for all their grumbling, all their complaining, all their Moses-and-Aaron-bashing, the Israelites never truly repented and lived their lives differently. They kept doing the same old same things. Repentance, on the other hand, is our first step to living the life God wants us to live.

What is the real meaning of repentance? For that answer, I want to refer you to another, more familiar scripture this morning. In Luke 15, we find the parable of the lost son. I won't read it in its entirety for you, but let me highlight the story. The younger of two sons goes to his dad and says, "Give me my inheritance." In other words, I wish you were dead. The father, without objection, gives the boy his money, and watches him depart. The son proceeds to spend every last penny on wild living: parties, prostitutes, everything. When the money runs out, he is forced to slop pigs. He realizes he needs to go back to his father, and plans to simply ask for a job as a servant or slave. At least that way he will be able to live.

Note, the son had a long list of sins he had to deal with. Rejecting his father. Wasting his money. Engaging in idolatry, greed, adultery, and wastefulness. He was selfish to the core. On top of that, he fed pigs, which were unclean animals by Jewish law. But the last, and worst sin he committed, was doubting he was worthy of his own father’s love.

This is what the father did when the son repented, turned around, and went home: “While the boy was a long way off, his father saw him and had compassion for him. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.” (Luke 15:20) Pig filth and all.

It is after this embrace that the son confesses his sins to his dad. And in response to his confession, the father welcomes him back, not as a slave, but as a son. They throw a party.

This story tells us that God already knows what we’ve done and how we feel about it. The father saw the son returning, head bowed, trudging along the path, smelly, dirty and pitiful. And the father looked on him with love.

Why do we need to confess and repent if God already knows what we have done? It is our confession that allows the healing to begin, that shows our sincerity to God. Repenting is not just saying, “I’m sorry.” It is turning away from sin and entering God’s arms. Grace is very costly. Any parent who has forgiven their child knows this. The car is still wrecked. The medical and insurance bills still need to be paid. But confession and forgiveness heal our souls.

Israel, God’s beloved people, seemed like they never wanted to repent. They just assumed they could do whatever they wanted, even if it hurt God.

Do you believe God loves you? Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13) God proves his love in this, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Yes, God loves you, very much, so much that God is not willing to let you suffer under your guilt and sin, your grumbling and complaining. He wants to restore you. And God will never force himself on anyone. When you are ready, when you realize the depth of your sin and want to turn from it, God will be there, waiting with open arms. But let us not make the mistake that everything is perfect. It is not. We are broken, you and I both, and we need the love of Jesus to restore us. We need the Holy Spirit to guide us, to keep us from sin.

Read verse 13 again. "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." Yes, there is a way out of trials and temptations. God has provided it. Through confession and repentance that we can find that exit.

Take a moment and consider your own life, and ask, "God, when have I offended you?" Be honest with yourself. Then simply say, "God, please forgive me. Lead me in the right paths, for your name sake." (Psalm 23:3)

The joy you will find after true repentance will make the allure of sin fade away to nothing. We will wonder why we ever thought those things would satisfy us, and we will know the joy of Jesus.

Confession and repentance are good for the soul, and you never have to doubt if God will forgive you. Isaiah 55:7 says this: "Let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."