

Desperate People Repent

This message addresses a very specific type of desperation, namely the type of desperation we experience because of our own sin. In 2 Corinthians 7:8–11 Paul has a very insightful discussion of the process of repentance. He gives us some categories that are very helpful when we're desperate for God to do a deep work in our lives.

Opening Question. Do a “free association” exercise: When you hear the word “repent” what thoughts, words, or emotions come to mind?

Read 2 Corinthians 7:2-16

1. Review the context of this passage. Steve said:

Our best understanding is that false teachers from Jerusalem had arrived in Corinth and tried to dissuade the Corinthians from being loyal to Paul. They accused Paul of trying to take advantage of them financially and that the message he taught was a perversion of the truth. The Corinthians - Paul's spiritual children - didn't defend him against these accusations. Apparently they began to waver in their commitment to Paul and (more importantly) to Paul's gospel about Jesus Christ.

When Paul learned what was happening, he wrote a letter to the Corinthians to try and set things straight. We no longer have this letter which was written between the writings of First and Second Corinthians. It is called “the severe letter” because he confronted the Corinthians very directly about their lack of commitment to him and to Jesus Christ. There was no guarantee that they would respond well and move back toward Paul; there was the possibility that they'd be offended and move further away from Paul.

Paul was greatly relieved to find out from Titus (who delivered his letter) that the Corinthians had received Paul's letter and had reaffirmed their love for him.

2. Why did Paul initially regret having caused sorrow by his letter (verse 8)? Why was his sorrow turned to joy (verse 9)?
3. Discuss the phrase “repentance without regret” in verse 10. Have you ever experienced such repentance without regret?
4. Why do believers sometimes not go beyond being “made sorrowful” over some sin? Why are people not always “made sorrowful to the point of repentance”?

5. Steve mentioned a “make-or-break issue” related to repentance: whether or not we believe that we can repent and take a different course in specific areas of our lives.

When it comes to our repentance, if we are convinced that repentance “won’t work” for us, then it probably won’t. You will have made a self-fulfilling prophecy. There can be lots of reasons why you might think that repentance really isn’t a live option for you. Perhaps you think that your past or your sinful habits are greater than God’s grace. You really believe that you are leashed to an immovable object. You need to know that if you have trusted in Jesus alone and have become a new creature in Christ, that way of thinking is a lie. . . If the gospel says anything, it says that Jesus died and rose again to give us freedom from our sins. Listen to Hebrews 2:14-15.

14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

Do you find it difficult to believe that you can truly repent? Why or why not?

6. What was your reaction to Steve’s example of repentance (“sins of the tongue”)? Did you groan at the amount of effort involved? Did you gain a vision of how you might pursue repentance in some way?

7. Steve mentioned four issues to consider concerning repentance. Discuss any of these that seemed especially relevant to you.

Consider sins of commission (doing things you shouldn’t do) *and* sins of omission (not doing things you should do).

Value the role of others in the body of Christ.

Evaluate your progress daily.

Make sure your repentance is an expression of faith.

Scriptures about repentance to ponder this week:

Psalm 32

Psalm 38

Psalm 51

Romans 2:1-10

Isaiah 30 (esp. verse 15)