



Teshuvah and Love

Understanding your place in God's heart...

by John Parsons

The following entry discusses the nature of repentance. It's my hope that this will encourage you to "return to the LORD and listen to His Voice" (Deut. 30:2).



REPENTANCE MEANS CHANGING how you understand yourself, and therefore it is intimately connected with how you understand God. As A.W. Tozer once said, "What I believe about God is the most important thing about me." Understanding the goodness and glory of God leads to self-respect, a sense of dignity, and so on. This works the other way around, too. If you regard yourself as small, insignificant, and unworthy, you will tend to consider God that way, too. "According to your faith be it done unto you." As you see God, so you will see yourself; as you see yourself, so you will see God. "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Mark 4:24).

Personal repentance implies encountering the revelation of God at "first hand." God does not love you at a distance, nor does he call you to embrace him at "second hand." Repentance, or teshuvah, is the "like for like" measure of God's love; it is your answer to God's question and call....

The message of the gospel requires that you regard yourself as worth dying for, that you are God's friend... "There is no greater love than this: that someone lay down his life for his *friends*" (John 15:13). God demands that you regard yourself as worth the sacrifice of his beloved son Yeshua in your place; he demands that you understand how dear you are to his heart. God sees something of such great value in you that he was willing to suffer and die to redeem it from loss... Just as the kingdom of God is a "pearl of great price," so you are a pearl of great price to God. What grieves and angers God is the refusal to believe that you are someone of infinite importance to him... Only God can rightfully make such a demand because He knows that loving other things more than Him leads to "disordered love," darkness, and eventual madness. We were made for God's love, but substituting finite things for this infinite need will never suffice to bring lasting healing to our souls...



Those who are “in the flesh” cannot please God (Rom. 8:8). We must turn away from regarding ourselves as mere “flesh” and understand that we are essentially spiritual beings created and redeemed by God (2 Cor. 5:16). We must give up the distinctions in the “world of basar” - the carnal world that is known through sensuous apprehension - and accept ourselves as “new creations” in the Messiah. It is “not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring” (Rom. 9:6-8).

The mere conviction of sin is not the same thing as repentance. We have to step beyond a troubled conscience and have our sin crucified by God’s love and grace. Grace is therefore essential to genuine repentance, since moral reformation is never enough. “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” We must be humbled so that we can receive. God gives us bitter experience of our inadequacy to call us to return to him. Only God can kill the power of sin within our hearts. Conviction of sin is not the end, but rather newness of life.

There is a place for godly sorrow, of course, and for genuine remorse over our sins. As we understand God’s desire and love for us, we begin to realize that the essence of sin is the refusal of God’s heart for us. The underlying issue with sin concerns the question of God’s love. Simply abstaining from certain actions does not address the deepest need of the heart. It is not turning away from sin that matters as much as turning toward God. The death of sin is meant to lead us to the life of love.

God is both infinitely loving and infinitely just, and both of these “attributes” are inseparably a part of who he is. God is One. Nonetheless, the cross of Yeshua proves that “love is stronger than death, passion fiercer than the grave; its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame, the very flame of the Lord” (Song. 8:6). It is at the cross that “love and truth have met, righteousness and peace have kissed” (Psalm 85:10). This implies that we must drop our defenses – even those supposed objections and pretenses voiced by our shame – and “accept that we are accepted.” It is God’s great love for you that leads you to repent and to turn to him. Allow yourself to be embraced by his “everlasting arms.”

מִרְחוֹק יְהוָה נִרְאָה לִי וְאַהֲבַת עוֹלָם אֶהְבֶּתִּיךָ
עַל־כֵּן מִשְׁכַּחֲתִיךָ חֶסֶד

me-ra-chok Adonai nir-ah li, ve-a-ha-vat o-lam a-hav-tikh
al ken me-shakh-tikh cha-sed

“The LORD appeared to me from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn you.” (Jer. 31:3)



Genuine repentance will *entirely* change you. It is an act of profound respect over what God has done on your behalf. You say, but I am a miserable wretch! Indeed that is so, but the consciousness of your wretched state is the heart's cry for love... God goes "outside the camp" to meet with you. He enters the leper colony to join you there, in your wretchedness, and even takes upon your fatal disease. He sees you in your desperate estate and joins you there. God enters into the dust of your death and says, "Live!"

But what about hell? If God so loves the world, how is it possible for someone to be sent to hell? In answer we must remember that God doesn't send people to hell, they choose to go there on their own... One of the greatest of sins is to forget who you really are, since that leads back to the hellish waste places of Egypt... God's redemption leads us to deliverance, freedom, and peace, but "a twisted heart does not discover good" (Prov. 17:20). Indeed, the idea of hell and God's wrath turns on the rejection of love. Hell is the state of soul that denies and refuses the truth of God's love. It is a terrible state of being both unwilling or unable to love and be loved.

Repentance means changing your thinking, turning around to face the truth, and returning to embrace God's love. It does not identify the whole person with sin, but rather regards all people as redeemable, worthy, and valuable to God. Conviction of sin is not the end, but rather the means to newness of life. God saved us so that we could be in a love relationship with Him. We must "choose life," and that means choosing to welcome God's love into your heart. The only sin that can keep you from God's everlasting love is the denial that his love is personally for you. You must forsake seeing yourself "in the flesh" and take hold of God's spirit, his passion, and his grace for your soul. You are worthy to be loved because God is worthy to make you so.

Repent and believe the good news. God is love, and that love is *for you*.