

Empowered by the Divine Embrace, Part 1

INTRODUCTION

Colossians 3:10. I want to talk about repentance. I want to talk about it from a perspective that's not always the traditional perspective, but I think it's the biblical perspective of repentance.

Often when we talk about repentance, the first thing that comes to our mind is what we feel when we talk about prayer, fasting, or money. "Oh no, not that again! Not prayer, not witnessing, not fasting, not money, not repentance, no!" Repentance is the glory of God when He reveals Himself to us in a way that exposes our agreement with Satan. Repentance is where God exposes by divine revelation; He gives us a gift of divine information in areas of our life where we persist in agreement with the kingdom of darkness. That agreement locks us into bondage, into death, and hinders our ability to receive the light and the life of the glory of Christ Jesus. Repentance brings us from agreement with the kingdom of darkness into agreement with the kingdom of light so that the glory of Christ Jesus can be more readily and more easily received in our experience.

We were created by Him and for Him. A lot of people have a fear of repentance. Because our minds and our understanding are by nature darkened, it seems so costly, so unlovely, to repent of the thing which He wants us to repent of, but the Lord never calls us into anything but a greater experience of divine life. He's a Father; He's the Father of fathers. If there's a Father that we should speak of, it's the uncreated God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Father of the Church. He's motivated from a father's heart. Jesus Christ is motivated from the heart of a bridegroom and He wants to bring us into the divine embrace. He wants to release the embrace of God into our experience in a greater way so that we have a greater capacity to receive light and glory and power and goodness from Him.

YOU WERE MADE TO FLOW IN THE RIVER OF THE LOVE OF GOD

Whenever repentance is talked about, almost always there begins to creep in an atmosphere of dead religion. Almost nowhere is repentance emphasized without a religious spirit preying upon this. Whenever repentance is emphasized, the enemy comes in with a religious spirit to prey upon the people. Normally, the people who are free from a religious spirit aren't very committed or they don't see the value of the glory of repentance. The people who see repentance are almost always being hampered by a religious spirit. Somewhere we have to see authentic, genuine repentance in the true light of how God gives it—in the light of His glory. It's an invitation to receive God and break our unity with the kingdom of darkness. The Lord tells us to repent of slander and criticism because slander and criticism keep us in bondage to the ways of darkness in our inner man. We can't love God in that tender, easy flow when we live in slander and criticism. The Lord says, "I want to move these things because you were made to flow in the river of love of God." Your inner man was created to receive a divine flow to be glorified by the presence of God's activity. The things that we entrench ourselves in against the promptings of the Holy Spirit, these things hinder the tender flow that beautify the human spirit and bring us into the glory of God.

Again, often when repentance is talked about there's an emphasis on external things that are bad. I think there's a place where we have to talk about external things that are bad. It's wrong to fill our minds with polluted things, with immorality or bitterness, but the biblical approach to repentance doesn't begin with a list of things that you outwardly do that are wrong. Repentance in the Word of God begins with the revelation of God. It begins with God revealing Himself, number one, and then with God revealing who we are to Him, number two.

When we see who He is and we see who we are to Him, repentance is an entirely different thing. It's not something we grudgingly do to get the anger of God off our back; rather, it's something we do with delight and a "Yes!" in our spirit. There's always a cost involved, but there's a delight as well. There's that paradox of, "Oh no, it hurts," because the darkness of the heart makes it hard to let go of things. There's also a glory dimension, where we experience a greater capacity to enjoy God, when we see the heart of God in His majesty, in His fatherhood, when we see the Lord Jesus in His cherishing love as a heavenly bridegroom beckoning us into His divine embrace. When we see the knowledge of God, number one, and the knowledge of who we are to God, number two, the warmth of that embrace empowers us to let go of things that resist the Holy Spirit.

REPENTANCE, LIKE SALVATION, IS A REVELATION OF GOD

Whenever there's an emphasis on repentance, there's typically a lot of religious clutter that goes on in the human soul. That religious clutter doesn't at all help the process of repenting. What I mean by "religious clutter" is this: you'll read a book, you'll go to a conference, you'll have a meeting, and the value of repentance is extolled. The need for repentance is lifted up, and because you're sincere people before the Lord, your temptation will be to come up with anything possible that's wrong and repent of it in a flurry of internal activity. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, oh God, oh God, please, please..." and we get into this hyperventilating mode of repenting of things that God never even convicted us of. We're repenting, not in the wake or the result of the overflow of the love of God touching our heart, but rather in the fear and the anxiety that we will miss something, and we haven't even touched God before we repented.

Some people may take advantage of that and say, "I'm sinning in this area, but God has never told me about it." If they want to live in dishonesty and use that as the excuse to continue in their sin, that's between them and the Lord, but what I'm saying is this, and it may be news to you: repentance takes some divine activity on the heart before it can be real, authentic, and effective. We can't just go to a meeting, have a man give a list of wrong activities, agree with those wrong activities, and come into a deep, effective repentance. Repentance, like salvation, is a revelation of God. Repentance actually requires the activity of the Holy Spirit revealing what God is like, revealing what you're like to God, and beckoning you into the divine embrace in a greater way.

WE CAN ONLY EFFECTIVELY REPENT WHEN HE AWAKENS OUR HEART

I don't find I can repent effectively over eight things. I've gone to a meeting before and had eight things listed and I said, "Yes! Yes! Yes! Oh God, I want to be Yours, I love You, I love You, I love You! I'll repent of all of them; I'm the worm of the earth. Oh, I'm horrible! Ah!" If I can cry, it's even better. What happens is that we feel good about ourselves; we've done our penance, we've put ourselves in probation, we've lived in purgatory on earth for a while, we're under the wrath of God in our own mind, and three months later, nothing has changed. The kind of repentance that changes us is the key, one issue, the issue with which God by revelation touches your heart in a certain season. That's the area He's dealing with because He's revealed who He is, He's revealed who you are, and repentance seems very relevant to your destiny. It seems relevant to the dignity of who you've been created by God to be. Repentance isn't something we just do because an aggressive, anointed, bold preacher gave us a list and we're so insecure and our hearts are filled with religious clutter. We spout off a bunch of things that we know must be wrong and we feel better about ourselves, but we're not changed; instead, we're catapulted into a religious spirit.

When people come and call for repentance, I would rather us wait on the Lord, get one specific area that the Holy Spirit's inviting us to receive in because of the value we have to Him and because of how glorious and how beautiful He is, and let that grow in our spirit. It's an act of revelation. We take that one area and bring it

before Him. God Himself is the One who releases divine activity in our heart. It becomes substantial in our hearts. It becomes a meaningful piece of divine information. It becomes part of the history of our love relationship to God. It becomes a part of the history of God beautifying us as His bride. It's not just internal clutter driven by a religious spirit, fueled by anxiety and fear that we're going to miss it, so let's just throw up anything wrong we can throw up so that we can feel good about the fact that we've repented, but we never change. Repentance is the gift of God. There are twenty areas that I need to repent of, but the thing I understand is this: I can normally repent of only one or two things, because my soul is so limited in its capacity, I can only receive this invitation by God in one or two areas. I really can't do all twenty in every season. I have too small a capacity to receive; my ability to remember is too small. My ability to receive new information is very limited. The Lord knows this, and He knows that I can really only effectively repent when He awakens my heart.

It's called divine activity. It's a gift of God when He calls me to repent. When I repent, it's not just because I don't want to miss out on the great things coming. Certainly there's that element, but that's a secondary element. It not just because I don't want to experience the wrath of God or the anger of God. You know, if you get into rebellion you can experience the anger of God. Those aren't really the things that touch my heart when it comes time to repent, as it does with regularity. What really touches my heart is the beauty of who God is. I don't really understand how beautiful God is; just a little, but a little goes a long way. I understand just a little of who the Father is and who His Son is, and who it is that's calling me into His embrace.

Secondly, the thing that helps me to repent is the knowledge of who I am to Him—the dignity, the destiny I have in the embrace of the love of God. Those two things, who He is and who I am, these are the things that make one little divine arrow of repentance hit my heart with a small amount of effectiveness.

THE RELATIONSHIP ISN'T HEALTHY IF YOU'RE OBSESSED WITH WHAT'S WRONG

When I think of my relationship with God, repentance isn't a major part of it. Some of you think, "It ought to be." It used to be, and I don't mean because all the wrong areas are right. I have plenty of areas in which I need to repent, but the nature of relationship can't be healthy if the focus is what's wrong. You can't relate to a spouse, to a child, to a parent, to a friend, you can't relate to anyone in an effective, wholesome way, if the focus is on what's wrong. That's how most of us relate to people; that's how most of us have been raised to be in relationship with parents, and we automatically do that with God, and the more sincere we are before God, the more earnest we are about relating on the basis of what's wrong.

I believe from the knowledge of the Word of God and my own experience and my limited understanding of church history that relating to God on the basis of what's wrong isn't an effective way to change you in five- and ten-year cycles of time. Relating to God on the basis of how wrong and messed up your life is feels good if you have a wrong orientation to God, but it doesn't really change you in five- and ten-year cycles. It's relating on the basis of divine revelation of who He is, number one, and who you are to Him, number two, allowing the Holy Spirit to awaken your heart even a little to a certain area, giving you an invitation, showing you that wrong attitude and activity and that wrong way of thinking that's keeping you in bondage to darkness which holds you in death. It's knowing that God loves you in the midst of awakening you to that piece of information; He's inviting you into His embrace so that He can release in a greater way the glory and the life of Christ Jesus into your experience to beautify your life, to release the glory of God into you. You can actually walk forward in that context.

That's the kind of repentance that I believe God is looking for. People say, "If we don't repent, God won't move."

I say, "It's just the opposite: because God's moving, we're now repenting." It's a very different approach.

Because God is moving, therefore we're repenting, and because we're repenting it gives us a greater capacity to receive, so God is going to release even more. I believe repenting begins with God moving, us responding, and when we respond to the initiative of God, God reveals His glory and the beauty we are to Him. We say, "Yes! I hate agreement with darkness. I love You, I love You, I want to be in a position of fully receiving everything You have for me." In that context, God releases even more because we're in line with Him. "Yes!" God does release more when we repent, but first He moved on us to lead us to repentance. When the whole thing is said and done, there's one trophy case in heaven, and the Man Christ Jesus' name is on it, not the names of the people who repented more than anyone else. The people who repent the best are the people God moved on the best. When this body matures in repentance it's because the move of God was matured and released in our midst. God moves on us; there's a certain divine activity, there's a revelation of God and a revelation of who we are to God. We respond with, "We hate agreement with sin, we love agreement with God"; that's called repentance, and we want to receive more of this awesome flow of redemption.

God says, "In that context I'll release more of My power for the sake of others."

THE GLORY OF REPENTANCE IS THAT GOD IS EXALTED

This is very important, because I believe we're at a time in history where the Lord wants to bring His Church into a depth of repentance; however, like sharks around blood, the enemy is right at the door to fuel and inspire the religious spirit whenever people get sincere about repenting. The problem is, if you start getting self-centered as opposed to God-centered, even in the repenting, where religious insecurity clutters your soul, you feel good about your repentance later on, and you feel good about how deeply you've repented, and you despise people who repent less than you do, because you think it all started with you, and you walk around with a self-righteous attitude called religious pride.

The Lord says, "No! I don't want to do that. I want to have the credit for leading you to repent; whether you know it or not it, it takes My activity to enable you to repent anyway. It takes Me moving on you before you even think of repenting. Let Me reveal My Son to you, let Me reveal who you are to My Son, let the relevance penetrate your heart, let Me get one or two key areas at a time, and let Me bring you into the understanding of how this area hinders you from receiving."

At the end of the day, five or ten years later, we look back over it and people say, "Oh, you guys really repented."

We say, "God was so good to us, in areas where we couldn't see. He showed us our agreement with darkness, He showed us the loveliness of His Son, and it was only reasonable to repent in the context of that kind of revelation."

It makes me nervous when we get this long list of do's and don't's, because there are some people who can do that list better than other people. Those people in five- and ten-year cycles end up becoming really proud and really mean. There's nothing worse than cruel holiness. I guess no holiness is worse than cruel holiness; maybe

not, I don't know. There's so much cranky, cruel holiness in the history of the Church, and it's not the grace of God. It struts around and it knows what everyone else is doing wrong. Let's not go too heavy on that. There's something else that the Lord is concerned with: it's the people who won't receive His invitation or repent over anything. God wants us to repent of many areas of our lives, but in a divine timing according to His divine initiative. Because He has shown us who His Son is; He has shown us who He is; and the word of God is growing and increasing in our life.

“RENEWED IN KNOWLEDGE ACCORDING TO THE IMAGE OF HIM WHO CREATED HIM”

Here's one verse. I will share on this for several weeks, so I'm just giving you the introduction this morning. The verse is Colossians 3:10, Paul says, “Put on the new man, who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Col. 3:10). That's a very fascinating verse, and every single phrase is power-packed.

Number one: Paul is calling the Church at Colossi to renewal. You could put the word *repentance* if you want. *Repentance* is a very appropriate word, but it's renewal; it's coming into agreement with the Holy Spirit. It's living a life of wholeness in relationship to the Holy Spirit. That's what He's calling them to. When you think of renewal, you don't just think of the “renewal meetings” of the last few years. Renewal is a lot bigger than the way the Bride of Christ has been using it related to some of the renewal of the Holy Spirit activities. God has called us into an agreement, a wholeness of relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Here's Paul's model in a nut shell. Again, we will develop this theme more in the next few weeks. He says, “You're renewed in knowledge,” or, “You're renewed by knowledge.” I just returned from Greece, and they speak Greek over there, and I asked them, “Is that renewed *in* knowledge or renewed *by* knowledge?” They said both of them are accurate. I can say with great authority, “The Greek means...” I talked to a bunch of Greek scholars about this, because it's a key phrase.

NOTHING CAN RENEW YOU LIKE THE POWER OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

It's interesting that when God wants to renew His people, He brings us into knowledge of two things. We're renewed by knowledge; we're not renewed by religious clutter. We're renewed by knowledge. If you want to be renewed, you focus on receiving knowledge of two things. Number one: the knowledge that's according to the image of God. Instead of the word *image*, put the word *personality*. When you receive the knowledge of the personality of the character of God, when you receive the knowledge of what God is like, that will motivate renewal or repentance like nothing else. There's no amount of threatening, there's no amount of warning, there's no amount of, “You'll be famous and anointed if you repent”; nothing can renew you like the power of receiving the knowledge of God.

When God reveals God to the human spirit, something in us melts and says, “Yes! I want more.” That's simply how we're made. God knows that. The very design of the human spirit is such that when God the Holy Spirit reveals the glory of God the Father and God the Son, something in us resonates. Something in us says, “Yes! Yes! Yes! I want to be in unity, I love this embrace; You and me together! I love it, I love it, I love it!” That's what happens in our spirits when God reveals God. The focus of a church that's going to be strong in repentance over months and years is a church that's focused on receiving the knowledge of the image of Him.

Of course, I don't want to say this critically but I do want to point out that the focus on the knowledge of God, on the personality of God, is, I believe, the single greatest deficiency in the Church worldwide and in history.

We have more teaching on ministry skills, mobilizing, mandates to do this and that, all these kinds of things in the Bride of Christ, and there's less focused preaching on the person of God in the Body of Christ, not just in this generation; God, God Himself, is the absent focus of church history. It's really true. Paul said, "Renewal comes by receiving the knowledge of the image or the knowledge of the personality of Him," and then he goes on to say, "the knowledge of the image of Him who created him." The NIV omits the second *him*, and the other versions leave it in. Paul says, "You're renewed by the knowledge of Him who created Him." That's funny terminology. Paul is saying, "First, it's the knowledge of Him, God, and secondly, it's the knowledge of the one God created anew in Christ Jesus, the new man."

There are two things we have to have knowledge of. There are two things that renew the human heart like nothing else: the knowledge of Him and the knowledge of the one God created in Christ Jesus. That's who we are in Jesus. That's our identity in redemption. It's how God sees us. When we have the knowledge of His personality, of the image of God, and when we have the knowledge of how God sees us, our spiritual identity, those two pieces of information, the glory of God and the beauty and dignity of who He made us in Christ Jesus, will renew the heart like nothing else can. Like Paul Cain says: they can hold you over hell on a rotten stick and shake it and try to warn you of everything bad that's going to happen to you if you quit, but when you get a person interacting with the knowledge of the personality of God, when you get them interacting with the knowledge of who they are in God, renewal becomes significantly more effective.

"SEE IF THERE BE ANY WICKED WAY IN ME, AND LEAD ME IN THE WAY EVERLASTING"

I want to say in terms of this spiritual family, our focus is to enter into a greater unity of God. We really want this unity; we want this agreement with the Holy Spirit. We want a supernatural lifestyle and we do want to remove the things that hinder it, but we will never remove these things effectively unless we have revelation of who He is and who we are. Knowing who He is and knowing who we are really increases our ability to resist the wrong things and increases our ability to do the right things. When we skip the revelation of God, we skip the revelation of the one God created in Christ Jesus, the born-again believer, our image; when we go low on those two things and skip right to repentance because we're afraid we'll miss something, we end up with a bunch of people filled with internal religious clutter. We end up repenting in twenty different areas, and the Lord says, "I'm going to put My finger by divine encounter on one of those areas right now; you're just filling the air with words and two weeks from now it won't make any change in your life."

Here's my point: it takes relationship to repent well. This relationship takes knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves in God. To repent well takes God's initiative touching us. Again, the abuse of that doctrine is: "I won't do a thing till God touches me; I'll just continue in my sin until He touches me." That's very irresponsible and non-biblical.

We're aggressively seeking God: "We want to be Yours. We want to be Yours, O God."

David said in Psalm 139:23, "Search me; show me the ways, bring to my awareness the things that You want me to let go" (Ps. 139:23-24, paraphrased). That's the focus: "God, there are twenty things that are out of sorts; show me the one in which You're beckoning me to Your embrace. Show me that way. Show me that key area."

Then, when we repent of it, we've done it in a context of love and a context of revelation, in the overflow of who He is and who we are to Him. We've done it knowing He's the hero and not us, and then when people look at you and say, "Wow, you've repented," you automatically think of the loveliness of the One who had mercy

on you, and not how much better you are, because you don't do the list; you're not focused on getting a better grade than before on the list of bad things. You do them less; you don't despise them; you have a spirit of gratitude and compassion and affection in your hearts. This is the goodness of God in our midst.

I really appreciate and want to support what the Holy Spirit is doing in our nation. He's calling His Church to repentance, but I want to use the model that I believe God spoke to Paul the apostle: the knowledge of the revelation of God and the revelation of who we are to God. Again, this is just an introduction, because there's so much to say about who God is and who we are in God. I just wanted to bring you into the focus of what I believe we should be looking at now in this season of God wanting us to let go of some areas that hinder our relationship with Him.

Amen and amen.

MINISTRY TIME

I want to pray Psalm 139:23 over you. Here's what David prayed: "Search me O God and know my heart" (Ps. 139:23). "Search me." God has already searched you; David is saying, "Show me the way of life. Lead me, Holy Spirit."

I want you to ask the Holy Spirit to lead you now. Oh, He loves you; He likes you so much. He's so filled with life and glory and you're so beautiful before Him as a born-again believer, He wants to lead you into the way of life. He wants to give you revelation to empower you to repent.

Holy Spirit, speak to us; talk to us. Holy Spirit, speak to this area in a way that would cause us to experience the Son of God. Lead us in the way of life. We want to know life; we want to know grateful, loving life. This is the glory of God, when He shows us an area to let go of. Lead us into the knowledge of Your heart, Abba. Heavenly Bridegroom, show us Your passion for our lives. Bring us into Your embrace. Empower us, O God. Show us the glory of who we are to You.