

The Doctrine of Repentance—*Thomas Watson*

Chapter Three — *The Nature of True Repentance*

- I. *Repentance is a grace of God's Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed. It is a spiritual medicine made up of six special ingredients. If any one is left out it loses its virtue.*
 - A. **Sight of Sin**—sin must first be seen before it can be wept over.
 1. A man must first recognize and consider what his sin is and know the plague of his heart before he can be duly humbled for it, Acts 26.18; Lk 15.17.
 2. Therefore where there is no sight of sin, there can be no repentance. Many sinners live with themselves and yet do not know themselves. They are ignorant of the sins they carry in their hearts. They are blinded by self-love and don't see what deformed souls they have, Ps 14.1. The devil also blinds them and “carries them hooded to hell,” 2Cor 4.4. They are insightful in worldly matters but they see no evil in sin and therefore no need for repentance.
 - B. **Sorrow for Sin**—a woman may as well expect to give birth without pain as one can expect to repent without sorrow, Ps 36.18; 2Cor 7.10.
 1. This sorrow for sin is not superficial; it is a holy agony called in Scripture a breaking of the heart, Ps 51.17; a rending of the heart, Joel 2.13; beating the breast, Lk 18.13, etc.
 2. This sorrow:
 - a) makes Christ precious to the soul. How welcome is the healing balm to the wounded soul!
 - b) drives out sin. Sin breeds sorrow and sorrow kills sin. The salt water of tears kills the worm of conscience.
 - c) makes way for solid comfort, Ps 126.5. The penitent has a wet seed-time but a delicious harvest. Repentance breaks the abscess of sin.
 3. But not all sorrow evidences true repentance. There is as much difference between true and false sorrow as between sweet and salt water. What is godly sorrowing? It has six qualifications:
 - a) Godly sorrow is inward:
 - (1) It is a sorrow of the heart. The sorrow of hypocrites is in their faces, Mt 6.16. It's like the dew on the leaf that never reaches the root. Ahab's repentance rent his garments, but not his heart (1Kgs 21.27). Godly sorrow goes deep, Acts 2.37.
 - (2) It is a sorrow for heart-sins, the first outbreaks and risings of sin, Ps 7.23. A wicked man is only troubled for outward sins. The true penitent grieves for the root of sin even though it never blossomed into action.
 - b) Godly sorrow is ingenuous
 - (1) It is sorrow for the offense rather than for the punishment. It grieves that God's law has been infringed and God's love has been abused. A wicked thief is sorry that he got caught but not that he stole. Hypocrites grieve for the consequences of sin but never for the sinfulness of sin.
 - (2) But godly sorrow is chiefly troubled for its sin against God, so that even if there were no conscience to smite, no devil to accuse, no hell to punish, yet the soul would still be grieved because of the prejudice against God. “Godly sorrow shows itself to be ingenuous because when a Christian knows that he is out of the gun-shot of hell and shall never be damned, yet still he grieves for sinning against that free grace which has pardoned him.”
 - c) Godly sorrow is trustful
 - (1) It is intermixed with faith. As our sin is ever before us so God's promise must be ever before us. That weeping for sin is not good which blinds the eyes of faith from seeing the provision for sin in Christ. Without faith, sorrow becomes despair, Num 21.8-9.
 - d) Godly sorrow is a great sorrow
 - (1) How great is great? The basic rule, says Watson, is this: the Christian has arrived at a sufficient measure of sorrow when the love of sin is purged out, Ps 6.2-3.
 - e) Godly sorrow in some cases is joined with restitution, Lk 19.8
 - f) Godly sorrow is abiding,
 - (1) True sorrow is not a few tears at a sermon, soon forgotten, but an abiding and habitual sorrow.

4. Note: sorrow for sin can be either rational or sensitive. Every Christian has a rational sorrow over sin, the act of the soul in which it *breaks* over its sin before God; but not every Christian has a sensitive sorrow over sin, the *weeping* of the eyes over its sin before God.
5. While our lives are to be perpetually penitent, there are special seasons when we should renew our repentance over sin:
 - a) before receiving the Lord's Supper—a repentant frame is a sacramental frame. The more bitter we take our sin, the more sweetness we shall taste in Christ. "The way to find Christ comfortably in the sacrament is to go to it weeping."
 - b) at the hour of death—when the soul is going out of the body, it should swim to heaven in a sea of tears.

***Next Study — Mar 15: The Nature of True Repentance: Confession of sin**