

Confession and Repentance:¹ Two Things Needed for True Revival²



SABBATH—AUGUST 3

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 5:30–32; 2 Corinthians 7:9–11; Leviticus 5:5; 1 John 1:9; Hebrews 12:17; Psalm 32:1–8.

MEMORY VERSE: “Anyone who hides his sins doesn’t [does not] succeed. But anyone who admits his sins and gives them up finds mercy” Proverbs 28:13, Nlrv.

ALL THROUGH THE BIBLE, PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS TAKEN THE FIRST STEP TOWARD SPIRITUAL REVIVAL BY REPENTING (FEELING SORRY FOR) AND CONFESSING (ADMITTING) THEIR SINS. And God has always prepared His people to do a great work for Him by leading them to godly sorrow for their sins. Once we acknowledge (admit) our sins and confess them, we are on the way to victory over them.

“The Lord is not slow to keep his promise. He is not slow in the way some people understand it. He is patient with you. He doesn’t [does not] want anyone to be destroyed. Instead, he wants all people to turn away from their sins” (2 Peter 3:9, Nlrv). This is true, but if we are to receive plenty of the Spirit’s power, we need to repent and confess our sins. These are two important things we have to do.

In this week’s lesson, we will study the book of Acts to understand how important it is for people to truly repent when they expect the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We will also understand the difference between true repentance and false repentance. Most of all, we will discover that repentance is a gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives this gift to help us to show Jesus’ love to those around us.

1. repentance—the act of feeling sorry for having sinned and turning away from sinning with the help of the Holy Spirit.

2. revival—renewed interest in God and the desire to improve one’s spiritual life.

SUNDAY—AUGUST 4

**REPENTANCE: GOD'S GIFT
(Acts 5:30–32)**

During the weeks before Pentecost,³ the disciples (followers) prayed hard to God for forgiveness of sins. Acts 1:14 says that they joined together in humble prayer. This experience of “one accord” means a strong unity (oneness) and agreement among Christ’s followers. This unity would not have been possible without repentance and confession.⁴ The disciples’ prayer and confession prepared them for what would come soon.

Read Acts 5:30–32. What important points can we learn from what Peter says here?



At Pentecost, the disciples prayed hard for the forgiveness of sins.

Peter makes two very important points. First, repentance is a gift. As we open our hearts to the leading of the Holy Spirit, Jesus gives us the gift of repentance. Second, the dis-

ciples themselves witnessed what real repentance was and how well it worked in their lives. They both experienced and preached repentance.

“The disciples waited for the promise of the Holy Spirit to be poured out. They humbled their hearts in true repentance and confessed their unbelief. They better understood the words that Christ had spoken to them before His death. . . . As the disciples remembered Christ’s pure, holy life, they felt that nothing they could be asked to do for Christ or give up for Him would be too much. All they wanted was to have Christ’s lovely character.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [Teachers and Leaders]*, page 36.

Repentance and confession are common topics throughout Acts (Acts 17:30, 31; Acts 26:19, 20). It is “the goodness of God” that leads us to repentance. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that makes us realize our need for a Savior who forgives sins. At the same time, we must remember that the Holy Spirit does not fill the hearts of people who refuse to repent (Romans 2:8; Acts 2:38, 39; Acts 3:19). The Holy Spirit fills the hearts of people who give up selfish ambition and the desire for honor and self-glory.

Why is it so hard to admit (confess) our sins and repent of them? Why is it so easy to let self get in the way of true repentance?

3. Pentecost—the time when Jesus’ disciples (followers) were in the upper room, receiving the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

4. confession—the act of admitting your sins to God and your faults to people.



Repentance is a gift that Jesus gives us.

MONDAY—AUGUST 5

**TRUE REPENTANCE EXPLAINED
(2 Corinthians 7:9–11)**

How does the apostle Paul describe true repentance? Read 2 Corinthians 7:9–11.

Repentance is a God-led sorrow for sin. It helps a person decide to give up whatever sins the Holy Spirit tells him to (Ezekiel 14:6; Zechariah 1:4). True repentance does not lead Christians into deep depression (sadness) because of their sinful actions. “Godly sadness causes [makes] us to turn away from our sins and be saved” (2 Corinthians 7:10, NIV). Instead, it leads us to focus (put our attention) on Jesus’ righteousness (perfect character; holy life), not our sinfulness. It helps us to look “unto Jesus, the author [the one who begins] and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2, NKJV).

All through the New Testament, our sin is never greater than God’s grace.⁵ For “where sin increased, God’s grace

increased even more” (Romans 5:20, NIV). This was certainly true in the apostle Paul’s experience.

Read 1 Timothy 1:14–17 and Acts 26:10–16. What do these verses tell you about Paul’s sinful nature and Jesus’ righteousness (perfect life)?



Godly sorrow for sin turns us back to Jesus.

The apostle Paul realized that he was attacking the Lord. So he went down on his knees to pray in true repentance and confession. For all of his life Paul never tired of telling the story of his own sinful nature and God’s grace. That is because Paul’s repentance did not make him feel depressed. Instead, it brought him close to an all-loving and forgiving Savior. The confession of Paul’s sin did not make him feel more guilty than before. Rather, Paul was more interested in preaching how righteous (holy) Jesus was than how unrighteous (un-holy) he (Paul) was.

Have you ever felt that you were

5. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

the worst of sinners? Or, have you felt that you were still too sinful to be saved? How can you learn to trust in the promise that Christ's righteousness is enough to save you?



Our sin is never greater than God's grace.

TUESDAY—AUGUST 6

**TRUE REPENTANCE AND
CONFESSION (1 John 1:9)**

Read Leviticus 5:5; 1 John 1:9; Isaiah 1:16–18; and Acts 26:19, 20. What does true repentance and confession really mean?

True repentance always comes with the confession of certain sins. The Holy Spirit does not give us weak feelings of guilt. He makes sure we know of our weaknesses.

“True confession always recognizes different kinds of sins. Some sins may be brought before God only. Some may be wrongs that should be confessed to persons who have suffered injury or harm through them. Or some may be public sins, and should then be

confessed to the public. But all confession should be clear and to the point. It should admit the very sins of which you are guilty.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 38.

The purpose of the convicting power of the Holy Spirit is to show our need of Christ's saving grace. Repentance does not make God love us more. But it helps us to appreciate His love more. Confession does not earn God's forgiveness. Instead, it helps us to receive His forgiveness. God does not love us more when we repent. He does not love us less when we fail to repent. His love for us is always the same. The only difference is our answer to the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The truth is that our hearts may fail to receive the blessings that God has for us. This is because our spiritual arteries (blood vessels) are full of the pollution of sin. Sin makes us insensitive to (not able to feel) the Holy Spirit's leading. Sin makes it harder for us to accept the Holy Spirit's leading. But repentance and confession open the clogged (blocked) vessels of our spiritual hearts so that we may receive the overflowing of the Holy Spirit's power.

We may want forgiveness when we confess and repent. But we must remember that it is a two-way street. For example, how do we answer those who have treated us wrongly and who ask for forgiveness? Some may not deserve our

forgiveness. But why is it so important for us to forgive anyway?

WEDNESDAY—AUGUST 7

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE REPENTANCE (Hebrews 12:17)

There are several good examples in the Bible of people who tried to repent but were not forgiven by God. They wept. They were sorrowful. They confessed their sin, but they were not forgiven.

Read the stories of Pharaoh, Balaam, Esau, and Judas in Exodus 12:29–32; Numbers 22:32–35; Hebrews 12:16, 17; and Matthew 27:4. What idea is in each story about repentance and/or confession?

One sentence in Hebrews 12:17, NKJV, describes it well. The verse says that “when he [Esau] wanted to inherit [gain] the blessing,” he repented. Like Pharaoh, Balaam, and Judas, Esau’s heart was not broken over the pain that his sin had brought to his family or to the heart of God. Esau’s greatest interest was in the birthright (right by birth) he had lost. Esau only was sorry that he had not received this birthright, which he believed to be rightfully his. His reasons were not pure. So, his sorrow was for himself. People who falsely repent are more interested in the results of sin than in the sin itself.

The law of sowing and reaping (gathering) is a principle (important

rule) of God’s law. It is true that sin brings terrible results. But repentance is not about the negative results of sin. It is about the dishonor and sorrow that our sin has brought to God.

True repentance is always shown by three things: First, a sorrow that our sin has broken God’s heart. Sin hurts us because we hurt Jesus who loves us so much. Second, there is an honest confession of the certain sin that we have done. True repentance does not come with excuses for our behavior. It does not put blame on someone else. With true repentance, we take responsibility for our actions. Third, true repentance always includes the decision to turn away from our sin. There can be no true repentance if there is no reformation (change) in our life. False repentance is self-centered. With it we show our interest in the results of our sin because our sins often bring negative results. With it we make excuses and lay the blame on someone else. We do not care about changing our lifestyle and actions. But true repentance results in the change that brings its own rewards.

THURSDAY—AUGUST 8

CONFESSION’S HEALING POWER (Psalm 32:1–8)

Confession is the same as cutting open the boil of guilt and letting the poisonous pus of sin come out. But confession is healing in many ways. It opens our hearts to receive God’s

grace. Through confession we accept the forgiveness that Christ freely offers us from the Cross. Confession is healing because it lets us receive grace. And confession also breaks down barriers (“blocks”) between us and other people. It heals relationships.

Read Psalm 32:1–8. What does this teach us about confession and repentance?

Read Acts 24:16, NIV. The apostle Paul tried “not to do anything wrong in the eyes of God and man.” What does that mean?

Is guilt good or bad? It all depends. Suppose the Holy Spirit makes us feel guilty because of sin. And the guilt of that sin turns us to Jesus. Then guilt is good. But if we have already confessed our sin and continue to feel guilty, the guilt may be negative and destroy us. “We must put this guilty feeling at the foot of the cross of Calvary. The feeling of being sinful has poisoned the springs of life and of true happiness. Now Jesus says, ‘Lay [put] it all on Me. I will take your sins. I will give you peace. Banish [remove] no longer your self-respect, for I have bought you with the price of My own blood. You are mine. Your weakened will [desire] I will strengthen; your remorse [sorrow] for sin I will remove.’ ”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, volume 9, page 305. The answer to guilt is Jesus. His grace removes the guilt that sin puts upon us.

There are times we may have confessed our sins, but we still feel guilty. Why? One reason might be that the devil is trying to rob us of the promise of salvation. He loves to steal away the blessed promise of forgiveness and salvation that we have in Jesus. Second, the Holy Spirit may be pointing out something between us and another person. If we have hurt another person, our troubled conscience will go away when we confess our wrong to the person whom we have hurt.

How has guilt influenced your relationship with the Lord and with others? What can you do to feel less guilty? Even if you have done wrong, what promises can you claim from the Bible to help you to move on?

FRIDAY—AUGUST 9

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Confession will not be acceptable to God without true repentance and reformation. There must be sure changes in the life. Everything that does not please God must be put away. This will be the result of true sorrow for sin. The work that we have to do on our part is very clear: ‘So wash your hands. Make yourselves clean. Get your evil actions out of my sight! Stop doing what is wrong! Learn to do what is right! Treat people fairly. Give hope to those who are beaten down. Cheer them up. Stand up in court for children whose fathers have died. And do the same thing for widows.’ Isaiah 1:16, 17,

NirV. 'He [the sinful person] gives back what he took as security for a loan. He returns what he has stolen. He follows my rules that give life. He does not do what is evil. Then you can be sure he will live. He will not die.' Ezekiel 33:15, NirV."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 39.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ What important lesson about forgiveness can we learn from Jesus' willingness to forgive those who nailed Him to the cross? If Jesus was willing to do that, how much more so should we be willing to forgive those who have hurt us?
- ❷ How has confession of sin been a blessing to you? How has it helped you in your relationship with the Lord and with others?
- ❸ We read this week about the need, at times, to confess to other people whom we have hurt. But why must we always be very careful about what we say to others?
- ❹ True repentance means putting away sin. But what happens if we fall into sin again? Does that mean our repentance was not true? Does it mean we cannot be forgiven for it again? Well, if this were true, what hope would any of us have? How are we to understand true repentance while still remembering our sinful natures (fallen selves)?
- ❺ From what we have learned this week, why is repentance a very important part of revival and reformation? How do the words *revival* and *reformation* show the idea that we do need to repent?