

Ash Wednesday Independence, pride

2 Corinthians 7:5-10 5 For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn-- conflicts on the outside, fears within. 6 But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, 7 and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.

8 Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it-- I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while-- 9 yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to **repentance**. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. 10 Godly sorrow brings **repentance** that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

Luke 18:9-14 9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:

10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men-- robbers, evildoers, adulterers-- or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Or Luke 5:27-32 27 After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, 28 and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. 29 Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. 30 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" 31 Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to **repentance**."

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Luke 5:32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to **repentance**."

When I lived in Florida more than once I heard someone say, “I don’t care how they do it in New Jersey, or I don’t care how they do it in New York, or I don’t care how they do it in Atlanta. This is Florida and we do it our own way. Have you ever heard that about Alaska? We people like to be master or boss of our own lives. But, where does that leave God?”

This year our Mid week Lenten Series is called Modern Day Temptations and Sins. On Ash Wednesday we begin the season of Lent looking at God’s love for us in the sacrifice of His Son, and considering our sin that caused Jesus to suffer. Because we are working to be honest about our sin, Lent is appropriately a time of repentance. One real life modern day temptation and sin is doing it our way, or pride, or independence from God, or defiance to God. The proper Christian response to this pride and defiance is repentance.

God has direction for our lives. You can point to the 10 commandments for that direction, and they are commandments, not suggestions. Or we can listen to Jesus’s summary of the law. In Matthew 22 Jesus says, “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.**”³⁸ **This is the first and greatest commandment.**³⁹ **And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’**

So, when God is calling you to love and worship Him, when God is calling you to give of yourself to love another, maybe even to love someone not so loving to us, have you ever listened to God’s direction for your life and told him, “No?” Have you ever told God, “I don’t care how you do it in heaven, but this is earth, and we do it our way.”? That would be the sin of pride, defiance, and independence. That sin would need repentance. Before we go any further please watch tonight’s skit.

SAM: Hi, Jane.

JANE: Hi Sam, I didn’t see you in worship the last couple of weeks.

SAM: That church stuff might be for you, but not me.

JANE: What do you mean?

SAM: Well, I’m not sure there is a God. If there is, there’s got to be lots of ways to heaven. Look at the Muslims, the Hindus, the Jews.

JANE: No Sam, you know. We went to Sunday School. God *IS* God. He made the world. He saved us. He cares for us.

SAM: Jane, I’m not sure there is a God. If there is, I’m not sure of His care.

JANE: Sam, God tells us He is creator and Lord of all.

SAM: That’s just it, Jane. No one is Lord of me. No one tells me what to do. I’m my OWN man!

We would all like to think we have not been defiant to God. In fact, if we have acted in this way toward God we are actually breaking first commandment. We are setting ourselves above God himself! But have you? Have you told God, “**No one is Lord of me. No one tells me what to do. I’m my OWN man.**”? Have you told God, “I know what you say, but I don’t care about not lying.” Have you told God, “I know what you say, but I don’t care about my body being a temple of the Holy Spirit.”? Have you told God, “I know what you say, but I don’t care about not committing adultery.” Or, Have you told God ““I know what you say, but I don’t have time for worship, or for prayer, or for sharing Jesus with others.” If so, the proper way to respond to this sin of pride and defiance is repentance.

But, in all honesty, repentance can be hard for Christians, especially people raised as Christians. We might not say it but we might think, "If I'm a Christian, I SHOULD be living according to God's direction. If I repent, I may show I'm not who I know I should be." Maybe that is why modern day people who are not Christians describe Christians as arrogant and judgmental.

So, please look with me at our Gospel lesson. Maybe there is a reason that Matthew was so willing to leave his open life of sin and follow Jesus. Matthew, a known sinner. Matthew knew His short comings, his sin. So when Jesus called Matthew to follow Him, it was easy to leave what everyone knew was wrong. Maybe there is reason the Pharisees and teachers of the law criticized Matthew for inviting known sinners to dine the Savior. They thought they were righteous and did not need repentance. But, their self righteousness led at least to obvious lack of love and concern for those people Matthew invited. So, there IS obvious reason Jesus had to tell these religious people, **Luke 5:32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.**" We are all sinners, and we all need to turn from that sin toward God.

Now, let's talk about what repentance looks like. Matthew not only left the tax table, He also followed Jesus. He not only left His sin, He actively lived in faith, following Jesus. Repentance is not just admitting sin, it is following Jesus and DOING GOD'S WILL. Repentance is seen when Christians are not arrogant, but humble. Repentance is seen when Christians think first, not of themselves, but show love and compassion to others. Repentance is shown when Christians have their priorities in order and worship and serve the Lord in His Church.

We have all been sick and needed a doctor. We are all sinners and need a Savior. And, the greater we realize our sin is, the greater we realize how great God's love for us is.

After 31 years of marriage my wife and I can laugh about some truths of our marriage. One of Kathy's favorite statements for me is, "Your job isn't to be right, it is to be sorry." There is some real truth to her statement. As Christians, our job is not to say, this is the way we do it, and we're right. That can become the sin of pride or defiance. Our job is to admit our sin, turn to Jesus, and follow Him in humility and faith, in love and obedience. May the love of God so move us!

SAM: Jane, I'm not sure there is a God. If there is, I'm not sure of His care.

JANE: Sam, God tells us He is creator and Lord of all.

SAM: That's just it, Jane. No one is Lord of me. No one tells me what to do. I'm my OWN man!

JANE: Sam, do you really mean that? Really?

SAM: Well, . . . well Jane, yes sometimes I just want to do what I want to do. But, deep down I know that my wisdom and desires just get me in trouble. I really do know there is a God. I just don't always want to admit it.

JANE: Well, Sam, it sounds like you know your sin of pride. Jesus died for that too, you know.

SAM: Yes, I do know that Jane. What a loving God we have, to love us even when we reject him.

JANE: It makes me want to serve Him more.

SAM: Me too. Thanks, Jane.

JANE: Thank God, for giving His son for sinners like us.