

Repentance

A matter of life and death

"From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17) Just before Jesus' public ministry on earth began, John the Baptist's message to the Jewish Church also rang, "Repent!" And as long as Jesus was on earth, the refrain resounded, "Repent!"

This message draws on the repeated cries of the Old Testament as well - "Turn around, make a radical change in your life, serve the Lord!"

The words "repentance" and "repent" are used at least 130 times in the Bible. And the need for repentance is made clear on almost every page of the Bible. The Lord God calls such great attention to repentance in His Word. We must take it seriously.

Two roads.

There are two roads in the world, says the Lord: a wide road and a narrow road. The wide road is the easiest and is followed by many, people are on the wide road when they live as they think best. They don't love God, and have no need for prayer or the study of His Word. Their thoughts and desires are directed to this temporal life. They ignore God's commandments and don't worry at all about the future. Because of that they often fall into grievous sins. The wide road leads to Hell!

On the other hand, the Bible also tells of the narrow road. Far fewer people travel this road. They are people who reckon with God and His infallible Word. They want to be instructed by God's Word. They want to love God Who created and preserves them. They also want to love their neighbour. The narrow road leads to Heaven.

What is repentance?

Repentance is to leave the wide road which leads to destruction and to travel the narrow road, the road to eternal life; to turn right around; to think and live differently, to give God His rightful place; to live according to His Word; to go to the Church where His Word is preached faithfully.

Repentance is turning to Christ.

Since the fall into sin in Paradise we are by nature rebels, resisting God. We wanted nothing to do with God, we chose for the devil, for Hell. Since the break with God, we seek our own pleasure, our own honour, and our own well-being.

In unprecedented love, God offered His Son Jesus Christ as Saviour. Repenting is loving this Jesus, following this Saviour.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him

should not perish, but have eternal life" we read in John 3:16.

Without Jesus Christ you are lost. But whoever believes in Him has eternal life. This Jesus died on the cross for the misdeeds and daily sins of all His children. Thus Christ delivers from sin. But then - he also expects us to live as His children, to begin a new life.

"How?" you may ask yourselves.

Read Colossians 3:5-17. Perhaps you live respectably, perhaps you don't gossip, or use abusive language. (Colossians 3:11), but, I ask you, do you live as verse 17 requires: "with every word or deed in the name of the Lord Jesus" Do you acknowledge him as your highest authority in everything that you do?

He who repents learns to follow Jesus on the narrow road - to Heaven. The Holy Spirit brings him to repentance and teaches him a totally new way of life. You can read about that in Galatians 5:19-24.

Led by the Holy Spirit, he receives love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22). The peace of Christ begins to reign in his heart. With a thankful heart he sings psalms and hymns together with God's people: the Church.

The fight begins

Following Jesus is not always easy, because the devil constantly tries to draw you away. Your life begins to be a constant struggle. You are walking on the narrow road - the way to Heaven - but the sins of the wide road are very tempting. You have to resist, every day of your life. You want to serve Christ according to His commandments, but you so rarely succeed! Paul illustrates this fight in Romans 7:13-26..."For the good that I wish to do I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not wish."

He who desires to live as a Christian, desires to live according to the commandments of the Lord. You find them in Exodus 20:1-17. Among others, there is the third commandment, which prohibits cursing, how often don't you catch yourself swearing again, although you had firmly resolved to stop? There is the fifth commandment, which discusses the authority of parents. Even those who walk on the narrow road sometimes still against their will - disobey their parents. There is the seventh commandment, which speaks of the sanctity of marriage. He who walks the narrow road will also have his temptations. The sexual revolution of the wide road does not leave the children of God unaffected. And so we could go on. God's good commandments try to keep us from accidents, yet we, time and again, seek out the filth of the wide road.

The feast begins

As we've already said, the wide road leads to Hell, and the narrow road leads to Heaven. What could then be better than following the narrow one? What a glorious future for those who live according to the Word of the Lord!

But don't think that this feast begins only after our death, in heaven. For believers, it begins today! Whoever follows Christ and obeys God's commandments, experiences great joy today!

In Psalm 119:72 we read "The law of Your mouth is better to me Than thousands of coins of gold and silver. " What is often most important to us? A new house, money, status. That's what we slave for. Often it is our only striving - and then we use it selfishly.

But whoever turns to God will find that God's law will give him more joy than all these. He will begin to serve God and his neighbour with his money - for example, through church collections, mission, charity, etc. He will sing, "Oh, for Your law I long wholeheartedly!"

The feast begins now - for those who believe.

Therefore the Bible, on nearly every page, calls you to repentance. God has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should repent and live. The Lord promises peace of heart and eternal life to all who come to Him and believe. Therefore repent - your life is at stake. Then the feast will begin for you, too.

Further reading:

John the Baptist on repentance: Luke 3:1-18
Returning to the Father: Luke 15:11-32