



REPENTANCE

THE
FIRST WORD
OF
THE GOSPEL

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SEVEN MOTIVES TO REPENTANCE

Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight, so that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, and blameless when Thou dost judge.

PSALM 51:1-4

Have you ever noticed the heading of Psalm 51? “For the choir director. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.” There is no question what the psalm is about. Nothing is left to our imaginations.

After David’s terrible sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the arrangement of the murder of her husband, Uriah, followed by his confrontation with Nathan and subsequent repentance (2 Samuel 11-12), David wrote not less than three psalms—Psalms 32, 38, and 51—acknowledging to the entire world his sin and shame.

In Psalms 32 and 38, David describes his wretched condition during that prolonged period (not less than nine months) in which he covered up his sins: “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer” (Psalm 32:3-4); “Thine arrows have sunk deep into me, and Thy hand has pressed down on me, there is no soundness in

my flesh because of Thine indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden they weigh too much for me. My wounds grow foul and fester. Because of my folly, I am bent over and greatly bowed down; I go mourning all day long. For my loins are filled with burning; and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am benumbed and badly crushed; I groan because of the agitation of my heart" (Psalm 38:2-8).

In Psalm 51 we find David's prayer for pardon. As significant as all of the words of this psalm are, let me ask you to focus on these few words from verse 4: "Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight." It is my intention to offer you seven motives to powerful, deep, and genuine repentance. All of these motives are drawn from this statement by King David.

One ought to feel genuine amazement when reading these words. Indeed, I hope you have already asked this question: How could David say to our Father in heaven, "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight?" I assume you are sufficiently well-acquainted with the incident to which this chapter refers to see the significance of the question. David says to God, "I have sinned against You, You only," but is that really the case?

As I read 2 Samuel 11, it appears that David deliberately stayed home at a time when he sent the army to the battlefield. The text makes it clear that he stayed in bed most of the day. People usually stay in bed because they are sick. That is probably why David stayed there, but his sickness was in his heart, not in his body. He appears to have been suffering from the spiritual illness of backsliding. David got up late in the day and went to the roof of his house. Do you suppose he just went up there for a breath of air? Perhaps he knew the approximate hour that Bathsheba bathed on her roof nearby. I doubt that he just happened to glance across the roof and was overcome with temptation. It is probable that he had deliberately stayed in bed until late in the day and then went up on the roof at a time when he knew he would see her. He allowed his lust to build to that point where he sent her an official summons to appear in his bedchamber, and there he committed adultery with her. How could he say that his sin was solely against God when he summoned Bathsheba to the palace? Did he not sin against her also?

When David learned that Bathsheba was pregnant as a result of this

illicit relationship, he ordered her husband home from the front line. The king brought Uriah into the palace, pretending that he was interested in a report of the battle. But actually he had a plan, an evil plan, to send the man home to his own wife and bedchamber, hoping that in lying with his wife that night the issue of whose child she was carrying would be confused. However, out of loyalty to the army of which he was a part, the husband did not go home to his wife but slept at the palace gate. The next day David brought him back into the palace and got him drunk, thinking that in a drunken state he could compel him to go sleep with his wife. But again the man's loyalty rose even above his drunken stupor. The third day David brought him back to the palace once more and this time wrote out orders for Uriah's death. David then had the grievous wickedness of heart to force the man to carry his own death warrant to the front lines. How could he say that his sin was only against God?

He had sinned against Bathsheba. He had sinned against Uriah her husband. He had sinned against his own family. He had sinned against the nation over which he ruled. And because all sexual impurity is sin against oneself, he had sinned against his own body. In truth, he had sinned against his whole world, and yet he said, "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned." Why? Why?

There is a principle here of such consequence that I hope that if somehow you missed it before, you won't miss it now. I pray that it will become a vital part of your heart and life in all the days before you. The great evil of all sin consists in this fact: it is against God. At last, David was so overcome with this truth concerning the great evil of sin that he realized that what he had done against Bathsheba and her husband and his family and the nation and his own body was as nothing in comparison with the evil he had committed against God.

David focused on a truth of the greatest possible consequence. No one can ever hope to live in genuine ongoing repentance who has never come to realize that the great evil of all sin consists in the fact that it is against God.

Perhaps you think of David's sins as much more vile than your own, sins requiring more drastic action. Suppose your sins are "merely" sins of the mind. Maybe you think, "My sins are private. Nobody is harmed by them." Possibly you acknowledge that you have entertained thoughts of revenge but are sure that you are never going

to do anything to get even. You may even admit, "I know that lust is there and that I think about forbidden pleasures a lot, but I don't have any intention whatsoever of following through." So your line of reasoning is simply, "Thoughts don't matter, because I never act on them and nobody is ever hurt." The error of such thinking is in forgetting that all of your sin is against God. You are hurting Him no matter what the sin is. God is always damaged by every sin. There is never any exception to this.

A summation of David's response to God in the four passages of Scripture cited above can be condensed into the following essential ingredients of all true repentance:

1. The knowledge that there is one true God who made him.
2. The knowledge that God made him for Himself and not for himself.
3. The knowledge that it is God's right to command, and to enforce all that He has commanded.
4. The knowledge of what God's commands actually are.
5. The knowledge of which commands have been broken and the nature of the transgressions committed.
6. The knowledge of the fate of the transgressor.
7. The knowledge of what must happen for transgressions to be forgiven.

In the light of the above review of David's experience in sin and repentance, let me ask you to consider the following seven motives to true repentance:

MOTIVE ONE: GOD'S SOVEREIGN RIGHTS AS CREATOR

We have no difficulty with the concept of the maker of a given object having the rights over that object. If you have artistic skills and paint a beautiful picture, it is yours. You have the right to hang it on your wall or to sell it in a gallery. If you compose a song, you have the right to never let anybody hear it, as well as the right to copyright that song and make it available to others. Because it is yours and you hold the rights to it, others can use it only as you direct and demand.

None of us made ourselves. We were all made by God. The God who made us did not make us for ourselves but for Himself. We are His creatures. We have been created in His image. He made us superior to all other creatures, and He made us this way in order to fulfill the role and purpose of our creation. As our Maker, He has His rights over what He has made.

We live in a world that is clamoring for rights. People are insisting, "I have my rights." From young schoolchildren to senior citizens, the clamor over rights is incessant. But what about God's rights?¹ The Declaration of Independence of the United States insists, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain Unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness . . ."

Suppose you were to receive in the mail a notice from my wife and myself stating that we were going to endow you with ten million dollars. What should you do? You should laugh and throw the notice away! No one can endow others with what they do not have. It is foolish to be talking about having been endowed with certain unalienable rights by our Creator if our Creator has no rights. He does have rights. Do you know what God's rights are? His rights are magnificently summarized in the Ten Commandments. You don't have any rights to your own use of the Lord's day. You don't have any rights to your own use of the Lord's name. You don't have any rights to your own use of sex. You don't have any rights to your own use of goods. All these things and others are set forth in the Ten Commandments as God's rights. It is very sobering to consider what happens in a society when the created try to usurp the rights of the Creator. The stark truth is that the rights with which our Creator has endowed us can only be preserved for us when we concede wholeheartedly to His rights. Every trespass against His rights loosens our tenuous hold on our own rights.

When I was approximately ten years of age my parents felt led by God to leave the church in which they were converted and join an evangelical Presbyterian church. It was while attending this church that I was converted to Jesus Christ, and in this setting I received much of my early training in the truths of Christianity. As a boy I was required to memorize many passages of Scripture as well as the Westminster Shorter Catechism. I can now thank God for that. There

is a question in the catechism that has helped me immensely through all the years since: "What is man's chief end?" The answer to the catechism question: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." Frankly, we need desperately to face this fact. Our nature as sinners is to please and glorify ourselves. But that is not why God made us. He made us to please and glorify Him. Tragically, multitudes of professed Christians are vastly more interested in enjoying God forever than they are in glorifying Him in the here and now. However, it is childish and silly to plan on the reward when the basic requirements are transgressed.

Nearly every parent can recall at least one incident in which they promised their children something conditionally. For instance, "This is a lovely day to go for a boat ride and fishing. If you will all get your chores finished by ten-thirty this morning, that is exactly what we will do." Ten-thirty arrives and all four children are insisting, "It's time to go," but alas, only one has finished his chores. You can imagine the griping and the complaining of the three when one child goes off with Father for the boat ride and fishing, and the others are kept home with Mother because they did not meet the condition of the promise.

* Whenever you sin, whatever that sin may be, it is against God's sovereign rights in creation. An act of murder is against God's sovereignty. A lustful thought is equally against God's sovereignty. No matter what the sin is, it is against God. No sin is considered so inconsequential by God that it is not an affront against Him.

You ought to focus upon God's sovereign rights in creation. You ought to begin every day with sober, serious, scriptural thoughts about the God who made you and the reason for your existence. If you will return to these thoughts whenever possible throughout the day, you will find yourself powerfully motivated to repentance. But if you tolerate a degraded view of God's sovereign rights, you will be robbed of this powerful and needed motivation.

When motivation toward repentance is lessened, the tendency to justify self and excuse sin increases. It then becomes easy to live nine months or longer without repentance. Supposing that nobody knows about his sin becomes second nature to the backslider. Even forgetting that the eyes of the Lord roam to and fro throughout the whole earth,

beholding the evil and the good, takes no effort when God is robbed of His sovereign rights.

MOTIVE TWO: GOD'S PERSON

Holy

A proper view of God's person is a powerful motive to true repentance. When Nathan confronted David concerning his sin, a major thrust of his accusation against the king was that he despised the Lord (2 Samuel 12:9). David might have argued as I have heard many do, "No! That's not fair. I love the Lord." But David gave no argument, for he knew the accusation was just. He quickly realized that at the heart of his sin was the degraded view of God to which he had sunk.

One of the fundamental truths that children in Christian homes are taught is the holiness of God. No one could be described as having a Christian mind who supposed that God was unholy. While the Bible proclaims fully and adequately all of the attributes of God that are essential to an understanding of Him and a devotion to Him, holiness is couched in language that sets this attribute apart from all the others. We do not read of "love, love, love" or of "power, power, power," but only of "holy, holy, holy." Surely God does not want us to miss this essential quality of His nature. In book after book of the Bible, the holiness of God is portrayed. Passages like, "Who is like Thee among the gods, O LORD? Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?" (Exodus 15:11); or, "For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am holy. . . . For I am the LORD, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; thus you shall be holy for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44-45); or, "Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His holy hill; for holy is the LORD our God" (Psalm 99:9).

Not only is God holy in His very nature, but "Holy" is His name. Consider Isaiah 57:15: "For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, 'I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.'"

Possibly the most amazing of all the truths concerning the holiness of God is the glorious fact that the Son of God lived among men for more than three decades and in all that time He never sinned even once. We are so blighted by sin that we can scarcely conceive of a sinless day.

Imagine the spotless Lamb of God totally free of all sin for upwards of thirty-three years.

But now consider this horrible fact: every single sin you have ever committed has been committed against the God of holiness. Every sin is like driving another spike into the hands of the Savior or thrusting another thorn into His brow.

Not only is God Himself holy, but He Himself hates all unholiness. The Scriptures are very explicit on this. Consider these very sober summary statements of what David learned: "The boastful shall not stand before Thine eyes; Thou dost hate all who do iniquity" (Psalm 5:5). Notice: God's hatred is not merely against the sin but against those who do it. "God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day. If a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and made it ready" (Psalm 7:11-12). "The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates" (Psalm 11:5).

The apostle John was led by the Holy Spirit to write, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). Have you ever noted the significant way in which the words "believe" and "obey" are used in this passage?

Paul gives a warning that every unrepentant person ought to heed: "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteousness judgment of God" (Romans 2:5). God's hatred of unholiness is the very reason hell exists.

All sin is against God's name, God's person, and God's holiness. David would never have sinned so wickedly against his God had he kept this truth close to his heart. But instead of focusing upon the person of his God, David focused upon himself, his desires, his pleasures. In doing so he forgot the God who made him, the very God of holiness whom he had actually intended to serve faithfully with all his heart.

It was not until the person of God came back into focus in David's life that renewal came. It was the realization of this truth that drove him to repentance. If you will daily remind yourself of the person of our God, you will find it a perpetual motivator to repentance.

MOTIVE THREE: GOD'S WORD

It is from the pen of King David that we learn, "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them Thy servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward" (Psalm 19:7-11).

But it was to this same King David that the question was pointedly asked, "Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight?" (2 Samuel 12:9).

All sin is a violation of God's word. We do not have to read very far in our Bibles to know that sin is an affront against God's law. How many commandments does God have to issue before we realize that He hates sin and that He is utterly intolerant of unrepentant sinners?

If we were an isolated people in some dark corner of the earth who had never seen a Bible or heard a Christian sermon or witness, our situation might not be nearly as perilous as it is. But we happen to live in a society where the Word of the Lord is readily available. Many of us have not just a Bible but shelves of Bibles. We know the law of God, and we know that all sin is against His law. If one claims to love the Bible and can say with the psalmist, "O how love I Thy law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97), but is not trying to live by that law, then the question Nathan the prophet put to David needs to be addressed to that person: "Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight?"

Is it possible that we think God's Word does not apply to us, or that we are under some special dispensation that frees us from the obligations God has placed on all others?

In chapter 4 I made reference to a pastor whose pride kept him from true repentance. Two or three months before the series of special meetings in his church, I had visited this man and observed a striking photograph on his desk which I was sure was not of his wife. This aroused my suspicions. The first Sunday in the series brought confirmation of

my apprehension that he was involved in an adulterous relationship with one of the women attending services. The following morning I confronted him with his sin, and he vehemently denied it. The more he denied it, the angrier he got until he left me in a rage. Late in the day he returned, admitting his sin but denying its consequence. Over and over, in a variety of ways, he informed me that I was making more of the issue than God did. He understood that God had a law on the subject that applied to ordinary men, but he was special. He insisted that God made unusual provisions for him because he was so important to the kingdom of God and such a virile man. He carefully explained that he was not built like ordinary men who could be satisfied with one wife, and that God Himself had always provided other women to satisfy his needs. He wept at every confrontation. He insisted that he was a saved man. He assured me that he was devoted to the Lord and that he had a very fruitful life and ministry. I kept pressing him to repent, but he did not.

While this poor man claimed to love the Lord and His law, his own pride kept him from realizing that the very law he said he loved placed him under condemnation.

Knowing the law, even loving it, is no substitute for keeping it. In recent years I have been increasingly alarmed over the numbers of persons whom I meet who do appear to love the Bible but give no evidence of loving the God of the Bible. What do I mean by that? Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). The connection between love and obedience cannot be broken. There are rapidly growing numbers in the church who are consistently disobedient to the Lord and thus provide regular evidence that they do not love Him. They do, however, appear to enjoy things about the Lord. For some of them, it seems that nothing delights them more than preaching, teaching, and debating biblical matters, but living what they claim to believe apparently holds no appeal for them.

Generally we are not under the impression that lawyers are vastly more righteous than other people. Obviously, knowing the law has not automatically improved their character. Indeed, there are indications that at least some of them use their extensive knowledge of the law to skirt around its true intent.

Knowledge of the law of God guarantees neither holiness nor a repentant lifestyle. Knowledge of the law of God has neither justifying

nor sanctifying power. Why then have I described the law of God as a motivator to repentance? Because the law of God has the power to break the heart of stone and to tenderize the conscience of the backslider. David acknowledged in repenting, "Thou dost not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; Thou art not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (Psalm 51:16-17).

We live in perpetual danger of focusing so much on the grace of God that we become insensitive to God's purposes in grace. Paul's pointed questions must still be faced: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" (Romans 6:1-2). Not only is the law our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24), but the law of God written on the heart is a constant reminder of God's standard for us and a motivator to a truly repentant lifestyle.

Many careless people sink so low as to suppose that God smiles upon their sin. This appears to have happened to David for a lengthy period. But when the word of the Lord came to him through Nathan the prophet, he repented and wrote, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Thy presence, and do not take Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners will be converted to Thee" (Psalm 51:10-13).

MOTIVE FOUR: GOD'S LOVE

There is motivating power in fear. Many have made their way to an altar or an inquiry room upon hearing a sermon on hell. But it is seldom indeed that the motivating power of fear endures for any great length of time. I have mentioned "foxhole religion" under the "Myths of Repentance" (chapter 4). Such religion may seem valid at inception, but it rarely lasts. Students caught cheating on university examinations are sure they will never cheat again, but most do. Few things in life are permanently improved as the result of fear.

But the motivating power of love is vastly different. Love is not an emotional experience but a commitment with the capacity to last for-

ever. That is why Paul celebrated love by declaring, "Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. . . . But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:8, 13).

The prophet Jeremiah addressed the issue of God's love in profoundly moving words: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness" (Jeremiah 31:3). The everlasting love of God is a precious truth that undergirds the whole biblical doctrine of repentance. If God's love were fickle, we might hope His love was toward us when our love was toward Him, but every time we slid backwards we might wonder if He still loved us. If our backsliding was as deep and as long as David's, we might fear total abandonment by God. But God does not fix His love upon a people and then withdraw it. God's love is not geared to our conduct. We have no grounds to suppose He loves us more when our conduct is good and less when our conduct is evil.

But Jeremiah's words concerning God's love deal not only with the permanent nature of God's love but also with its drawing power. What brought David back from his wandering? God's sovereign rights as Creator? Yes! The holiness of God's person? Certainly! The law of the Lord? By all means! The love of God! Now you've got it!

Think again of David's own description of his wilderness experience in Psalms 32 and 38. "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long" (32:3). Out of incredible love, God caused His backslidden child to feel his sin by wasting circumstances. Had God not loved David, He might have allowed him to completely enjoy the pleasures of his sin. "Day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me" (32:4a). That heaviness, that feeling as if he were carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders, was a vital part of the drawing power of God's love. "My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer" (32:4b). The man who had known mountaintop and bubbling-spring experiences with his God is reduced, out of divine love, to a barren wilderness existence. "My iniquities are gone over my head, as a heavy burden they weigh too much for me" (38:4). The crushing weight of his own sin was a visitation of everlasting love.

“I go mourning all day long” (38:6). In lovingkindness the joy of the Lord was removed, and the king was benumbed and crushed.

Realization of and meditation upon the love of God is a very powerful motivation to repentance. Consider these remarkable words: “But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand” (Isaiah 53:10). The death of Christ was not an accident. Christ did not die merely because a group of religious leaders determined to crucify Him. No! It pleased the Father to crush Him. Imagine such a thing! Our Father in heaven was pleased to crush His only begotten Son! We sometimes think deeply upon the tremendous price Christ paid to sacrifice Himself for our sins, and well we should. But have you considered what it cost the Father to crush Him and to do so with pleasure? How could any father take pleasure in the crushing of his own son? Our Father in heaven knew that by the crushing of the Only Begotten, many sons would be brought to glory. He had you in His heart in the crushing of Christ. His love for you is so vast, so deep, so wide, that He deliberately chose the second person of the Trinity, the incarnate Son of God, to suffer and die in your place on that awful tree.


MOTIVE FIVE: THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

When I survey the wondrous cross
 On which the Prince of Glory died,
 My richest gain I count but loss
 And pour contempt on all my pride.²

It was blind pride that caused King David to think that he needed, deserved, and had the right to take Bathsheba from her husband and then arrange his death. David’s pride is at the heart of Nathan’s little parable of the rich man snatching the poor man’s only ewe lamb. Indeed, a very high percentage of all sins have pride at their heart.

I can think of no object in all the world with greater capacity to crush human pride than the cross of Jesus Christ. It is very humbling to think that every single one of us is such a terrible sinner that our only way to God is the cross. Even the sacrificial system of the Old

Testament was only temporary, pointing to the ultimate truth that it is only the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ that saves.



The cross as an ornament or an object of art is powerless. Its viewing might occasionally promote pity, but no degree of wearing or displaying the cross will save. Salvation is not in the object but in its accomplishment. The Lord Jesus Christ died in the place of sinners. "He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to His own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (Isaiah 53:5-6). "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). "He [God] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit" (1 Peter 3:18). "And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Colossians 2:13-14).

There is little wonder then that Paul urged us to consider ourselves "to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11). "But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14). "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

When one considers that Christ died for the sins of the whole world, the thought may have very little personal impact. But when the cross of Christ is personalized and one realizes and says to himself, "He died for me," it becomes a very powerful matter, especially when you realize what death meant for Christ. When a repentant and believing person passes from this life, he is described as having fallen asleep. This is not just archaic King James language. This is one of the most blessed truths

of the Bible: believers do not die, they sleep in Jesus. Death is separation from God, and the believer will never endure that. But when Christ hung on the cross, He died. He did not sleep. He was separated from His own Father. When He cried out, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34), He meant exactly what He said and He felt deeply what He meant. His Father had turned His back on Him. He died alone. While He could have called ten thousand angels either to rescue Him or at least to be with Him in His sufferings, He suffered and died without any succor, betrayed by man and forsaken by God. And all for you and me.

Every sin that a believer commits is against the body and blood of Christ. Whether it be a sin of commission or a sin of omission, it is against the Savior who died in your place. Whether you think of sin as minor or whether you know it to be major, it is against the Lord who has already suffered much for you. Every day you linger in an unrepentant state you add to the grief of the Savior whose body was broken and whose blood was shed for you. How can you add to His sufferings?

Every celebration of the Lord's Supper is intended to vividly remind you of this suffering. Every remembrance of His crucifixion, every reminder of the tender atoning work of Jesus Christ on your behalf, serves as a powerful call to repentance. Will you heed this call?

MOTIVE SIX: GOD'S WARNINGS

These days you rarely ever hear anyone accused of being a "hell-fire and brimstone" preacher. It is not that unregenerate people no longer despise such preaching but rather that the church cares too little for the eternal welfare of the lost to severely warn them of what awaits.

The biblical position is now as it has always been. The holy God has absolute intolerance for sin. Because of His hatred of sin and His love of mankind, He has provided a way of escape from His eternal wrath. All who repent of their sins and cast themselves upon Christ in faith will be spared. All who persist in their unbelief and disobedience will suffer eternally in the lake of fire.

I am well aware that many teach against eternal suffering and insist that a loving God will never be responsible for such an atrocity. But frankly, I am content to let God speak for Himself. "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all

stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:41-42). Christ made it clear that it would be wiser to go through life crippled or blind than to be led into sin by some body part and then cast into hell, where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched (Mark 9:42-48). Jesus warned, "My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!" (Luke 12:4-5). In other words, "I am the one you had better fear!"

Christ believed in an eternal hell, a lake of fire, a place of such perpetual horror that no one ought to willingly go there.

Perhaps you have given altogether too little attention to the dire warnings and threats of Scripture, but they are there whether you have noticed them or not. If you heed them, they will drive you to repentance. If you neglect them, they will come to pass at your expense. They are not going to go away. God will be governed by His own word of truth: "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:26-31).

MOTIVE SEVEN: GOD'S ASPIRATIONS FOR US

All sin is against God's aspirations for us. A blessed sense of these aspirations is a powerful motivator toward the fullest possible repentance.

Perhaps *aspiration* is not a word you regularly use. I am speaking of God's lofty desires for you. God has a plan and a purpose for your life. He aspires that you ascend the highest mountains of spirituality. God wants you to know the most glorious levels of victory in Christ Jesus.

He wants to enable you to live, not as a spiritual weakling, forever tripping over your sins, but as a giant in the land. Indeed, God aspires that you might be like His own dear Son.

Our Lord has a marvelous way of dealing with sinners. Have you ever stopped to think about His handling of Simon whom He renamed Peter? He could have said to Simon, "You are not very dependable. You have a big mouth, and somehow you always manage to put your own foot in it. If you could only learn to be still, it would be wonderful. If you could only learn to be a good listener—oh, the progress you would make." But instead He gave him a name of great consequence, "Peter, the Rock, the bulwark of strength, the reliable one." Why? Was it because our Lord couldn't see Peter's problems? No! Our Lord could see what Simon was, but He could also see what Peter was going to be. And so He gave him a name that reflected His aspirations: "Thou art Peter." Are you aware that the Lord Himself is not thinking of you as you are but as you are going to become? A realization of this is a mighty incentive to full-scale repentance!

You may be focused on your failures. You may be overwhelmingly aware of your past and dubious of ever rising above it. But God is not. He knows not only what you have been and what you are but also what you are going to be under the power and the influence of Christ working through the Word and through the Spirit in your life. His aspirations for you are marvelous, and He has all the power it will take to bring them to pass.

Many years ago, I felt led to begin praying for my son a prayer that I have prayed perpetually since then: "O God, make my son vastly more godly and useful in Your kingdom than his father ever has been or ever will be." My son knew nothing of this prayer for many years. Then one day in journeying to the Orient, I had to stay overnight in a distant place where he lived at that time. I called him and said, "Bob, tonight I will be at _____ Hotel, and although I don't know what your plans are for the evening, I would love to spend some time with you if you are free."

"Oh, Dad," he said, "I will be there for sure." And so he was. All evening long together in the hotel room we discussed the things that were on our hearts, and the things that were important pertaining to the kingdom of God. Then suddenly I felt moved to say to my son, "Bob, it never seemed right to tell you this before, but now I am going to tell

you what your father's aspiration for you is. Bob, I have been praying for years that you will be immensely more fruitful and holy than your father ever has been or will be."

He sat there, I believe, astonished. Tears formed in his eyes. And he said, "Dad, I will never forget that." And I have every reason to believe that he hasn't! But that is no more than an earthly father's aspiration for his earthly son. While I have the power to keep on praying, I do not have the power to bring it to pass.

Our heavenly Father's aspirations for us are infinitely above those of any earthly father. Gloriously, He has not only amazingly lofty aspirations for us, but He has also the power to bring those aspirations to pass.

Long before you were born, God had you in His heart. All through these years He has kept His incredible aspirations toward you intact. If you will walk in total agreement with Him, if you will live in perpetual repentance, then you will not miss the fulfillment of His lofty aspirations on your behalf. But if you go on sinning, you will never experientially know what He has had in His heart for you.

There is incredible motivating power toward repentance in your heavenly Father's aspirations for you. Are they affecting you as they ought and can?

Do you feel the power of these seven motivations? Then will you let them mold and shape you in all the days to come?