

The Goodness of God Leads to Repentance

"The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." – Romans 2:4

Summary:

Repentance is necessary for every fallen person, yet saving repentance is produced by God's goodness rather than by terror alone. Fear may restrain rebellion, but Christ's forgiving love softens the heart, awakens shame for sin, and draws the sinner home. Peter's tears and the prodigal son's return show that grace makes believers feel their guilt more deeply while giving them hope. True Christian repentance is therefore evangelical, filial, and willing: the pardoned sinner hates former sins, delights to obey the Father, and mourns with the promise of comfort.

Outline:

1. Repentance prepares us for life

- God gives grace before glory and makes his people holy before making them happy with himself.

2. Goodness leads where terror cannot

- Fear may produce alarm, but only gracious love brings sincere and saving repentance.

3. Christ's look breaks the heart

- Peter remembered his denial when the Lord looked at him, and he went out and wept bitterly.

4. The Father welcomes the returning sinner

- The prodigal was drawn home by remembered goodness and received with compassion and overflowing forgiveness.

5. Forgiveness produces willing obedience

- Evangelical repentance replaces rebellion with love, gratitude, hope, and delight in the Father's will.

Text

Repentance is essential for every fallen creature. While it, along with all its associated blessings, originates from God, His work follows a divine order. He must perform certain actions for us before others. He grants grace before glory; and before completing our happiness with Himself, He first makes us holy like Him. Hence, Scripture mentions “repentance unto life.”

Notice how God brings about true repentance. It comes through His goodness, not through fear of His power. Cain, Pharaoh, and Judas were frightened into repenting, but their repentance was not genuine or salvific. In contrast, Peter was genuinely led to repentance. After he grievously sinned by denying Jesus with oaths and curses, the Lord looked at him. That moment of His gaze shattered Peter’s heart, leading him to go out and weep bitterly.

In the Gospel, he draws us with the cords of a man and with bands of love. This repentance is like a gentle mother drawing her misbehaving child close, gently correcting him until he hides his face in embarrassment and sobs on her breast. It is not like a harsh father pushing the offender away with distance, secrecy, dislike, or lies. If it is a father, he is like the father of the prodigal son.

Unable to bear his father’s restraint, the reckless son demanded his inheritance and journeyed to a distant land. Soon, he squandered all he had. A famine came, and he found himself feeding pigs. No one offered him anything, and he yearned even for their food. Finally, he came to his senses. The idea of home struck him: “There is plenty of bread in my father’s house, and I am starving. I will get up and go back to my father.”

While he was still a long distance away, hesitant and afraid to approach, his father saw him, felt compassion, ran to

meet him, embraced him warmly, and kissed him. The son had a confession ready and a request to be treated as the least privileged, but he received unconditional forgiveness before he could speak. The father then ordered the finest robe, a ring, and shoes for him, and prepared a celebration: "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

The prodigal had previously felt unworthy, but now he was much more remorseful. "What a father have I wronged! What goodness have I scorned! What love have I mistreated!" He would blush and weep as he saw himself not only clothed but decorated, and not just fed but warmly invited to a feast. Overwhelmed by such kindness, he might ask, "How can I bear all this?"

Despair hardens, but we are saved by hope. Threatenings may frighten us from sin, yet genuine goodness instills a reluctance to sin. Fears might force us to abandon rebellious acts; however, true goodness prompts us to despise these acts, cast them aside, weep over them, and rekindle our devotion to God with the words, "O Lord, other lords have had dominion over us, but by thee will we make mention of thy name."

Many people often misinterpret Christian repentance. It is not about legalism but rooted in evangelical faith; not about serving out of fear but out of filial love. It is not degrading; instead, it is connected to the noblest feelings of the heart. It does not involve despair and misery but thrives in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."

This sermon is taken from William Jay's devotional, *Morning and Evening Exercises* (January 13, Morning), first published in 1854.