

What We Believe (1): sin, redemption, repentance

Romans 3:23 (NASB)

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Isaiah 53:6 (NASB)

**All of us, like sheep, have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the Lord has caused the wrongdoing of us all to fall on Him.**

Introduction

Let me begin my sermon with a Bible trivia. I am going to tell you four verses from the Bible. In fact, all of them are Jesus' words. Your job is to choose one right answer to the question. Here's the question. *Which one of the following four was used as His public ministry slogan?* 1. "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of people" (Matthew 4:19). 2. "Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). 3. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). 4. "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me" (John 14:1). The correct answer is "3."

Imagine this: let's say, on my first day here at Manahawkin UMC, I did exactly as Jesus did, that means, preaching a sermon with the title "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." How well would I be accepted by you? One thing is for sure: repentance is not a popular topic among God's people. But that's how Jesus started His public ministry. That makes us think. Please reason with me, here. Why did Jesus choose this very sentence, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*, to bring people back to their heavenly Father?

Here's why, I believe, He did so. Repentance is the foundation of our relationship with God. It is the door to God's Kingdom. Through repentance of our sins in Jesus, we enter Heaven. Our relationship with our heavenly Father begins with a clean slate. That is, clearing our own sins, and that act of clearing our sins is repentance.

Jesus still calls everyone today to repent and enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Before I dig deeper, I would like to do a reality check on two things in the Church:

wrong attitude toward repentance, and the infiltration of secular culture in people's mind and heart.

Content

A. Avoid repentance because it is 'negative'?

Rooted in "self-love" and "self-aggrandization" mindset, some believers deny the need of repentance altogether considering repentance an unpleasant subject. More others shun any sermon that talks about sin and repentance, because, they say, it is depressing to focus on one's own sin. They clamor for something positive instead, feel-good sermons and teaching in the Church. Well, if you are one of them, let me ask you this: how, then, do you take God's Word that talks about 'sin' (1328 times), 'repent' (100 times), forgive (143 times)? Remember: God talks about all these subjects to help us, not to hurt us. Repentance is for eternal life.

Someone once asked C. S. Lewis why Christianity encourages morbid introspection. Lewis answered: "*The alternative is much more morbid. Those who do not think about their own sin make up for it thinking incessantly about the sins of others. It is healthier to think of one's own.*" He concludes, "*A serious attempt to repent and really knows one's own sins is in the long run a lightening and relieving process*" (C. S. Lewis, *How to Pray*, p. 63). Repentance is a good thing. Embrace it.

B. Beware of Infiltration of Secular Culture in the Church.

Many God's people are conformed to the pattern of the world today. The secular culture has deeply permeated among God's people, and it causes them to repeat the worldly message in the Church without even knowing it. Consider how often people are brain washed with the message from the secular media after watching without filtering and blindly absorbing what the media dictate. E.g. One time, there was a shooting incident in California. I happened to watch CNN news, and the anchor emphatically said to the audience, "I don't need your sympathy. I need gun control!" On the following day, I happened to watch CNN again. This time, a reporter interviewed the mother of a victim, who screamed to the audience on camera, "I don't need your sympathy! I want gun control!" I couldn't believe what I heard! It was a 'word for word,' 'verbatim' repeat of what the anchor had spoken the day before! So, next time, test yourself: Observe carefully what people say about any

topic of discussion. Most of them would simply repeat what they watched and heard in the media. Word for word, sometimes.

Such reality in the Church resulted from the casual attitude among believers toward how they spend their time. Ask yourself: *how much time do I spend watching TV and Internet each day and how little time I spend getting into the Word of God and praying.* It is a no brainer, folks. We reap what we sow. When we constantly fill our hearts and minds with the worldly message, day in day out, we are bound to repeat someone's opinion or ideas that we heard from TV, Internet, and movies, while we remain totally ignorant of what God's Word says about any given societal malady.

Let's get back to today's text where God's Word points out to sin, redemption, and the Messiah.

Romans 3:23: *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,....*

All have sinned means, with no exception, everyone has sinned. I did. You did. Everyone did. Everyone does. And everyone will. The outcome is that we all fall short of the glory of God. By the way, we need to understand what the glory of God is before we try to grasp the meaning of God's Word here.

What is *the glory of God*? There can be many answers (the splendor and majesty of God, God's invisible qualities and character, and so forth), but here's my simple understanding of God's glory. *The glory of God is the state of every creature as God originally created for it to be and to work in harmony, unity, no abuse, no pollution, or no disarray.* For instance, God created the universe so that it may operate according to the seasons and times. Every day, the Sun rises and sets. The seas know their boundaries. Stars in heavens move according to the divine order. As all the creations move and operate as God has designed, they all bring glory to the Creator. Same goes with people like you and me. When we live according to God's will and purpose, we glorify God our Father.

Well, the world we are living in now doesn't reflect such glory of God. On the contrary, we live in a world of chaos and disharmony. The world is filled with hate, greed, and violence. It has been this mess for thousands of years. In fact, it has been that way from the moment when sin entered human lives through Adam's disobedience to God. The Bible clearly declares that this mess was created and

caused by sin. *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,...* Let me take you to the second verse in today's text.

Isaiah 53:6. *All of us, like sheep, have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the wrongdoing of us all to fall on Him.*

Right after the Fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, God came up with an eternal solution for our sin problems. That solution is the Messiah. Now, listen one more time, Isaiah 53:6. *All of us, like sheep, have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the wrongdoing of us all to fall on Him.* Onto Him, the Messiah, the LORD laid the iniquities of us all.

Since we talk about sin, we'd better understand what sin is. I am sure you have your own understanding of sin, but let me tell you what the Bible says about sin: its literal meaning is, **'to miss the mark'** (*hatta't* in Hebrew, *ha-mar-ti-a* in Greek). The mark here is God's will and His glory. To sin means to miss the will of God. Sin is a failure to fulfill God's glory. It is a failure to give glory to God.

Imagine that archery is your hobby. You're practicing shooting arrows. Your goal is to hit the bull's eye. That bull's eye is the glory of God in your life. When you willfully choose what is not right in the sight of God, you miss the glory of God, and it is a 'sin.'

Let me share with you three more definitions of sin. The first one is from Susanna Wesley, mother of John Wesley the founder of Methodism. To her son, she wrote: *"Take this rule: whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off your relish of spiritual things; in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself."*

— Susanna Wesley (Letter, June 8, 1725) (<https://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/sin.htm>)

Next, John Wesley's definition of sin: a "willful violation of a known law of God" (Wesley, 1872). (<https://thechristianthing.com/the-definition-of-sin-john-wesley/>)

Thirdly, Judaism understands sin as: *A violation of any divine commandment such as the Ten Commandments.*

So, based on these understanding of sin, all people with no exception have sinned at various points of their lives. Everyone in history (past, present, and future) is a sinner, God's truth declares. Please get this: God is never interested in putting us down by His truth. I understand that some folks get annoyed with the word 'sin' due to their bad experiences with their religious upbringing or church background, therefore, avoid this word 'sin.' I pray for their healing. But certain individual cases must not and cannot cancel God's truth about human depravity. We all are born with propensity to sin, and using our free will we all sin from time to time.

Redeemed Sinners: Saints

By the way, we are not just sinners. We are "redeemed" sinners. That means, our sins are forgiven through repentance in the name of Jesus. We have the hope of resurrection and eternal life in the presence of God. All through Christ who paid the wages of our sin through His own death.

Such redeemed sinners, calls God, "saints---the sacred and holy ones." I hope you have been following me. You and I are *sinners*, but we are *saints* as well. You may say to me, "No, I am not a saint." You are very humble. But let me say it again: you and I are the saints in the sight of God.

Some References in the Bible. In the Old Testament, Psalm 34:9 says, "*Fear the Lord, you His **saints** (שׁוֹמְרֵי--'kah-doh-shim'---in Hebrew); For to those who fear Him there is no lack of anything.*" Daniel 7:18 says, "*But the **saints** of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and take possession of the kingdom forever, for all ages to come.*"

In the New Testament, "... Your **saints** (αἱολοι---'hah-ghi-oi'---in Greek) in Jerusalem; (Acts 9:13, Romans 15:25). Paul the Apostle wrote his letter: "*To the **saints** who are at Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus*" (Ephesians 1:1). Paul instructed Timothy to choose a deaconess who has "*a reputation for good works; ... brought up children, ... shown hospitality to strangers, ... has washed the **saints'** feet...*" (1 Timothy 5:10).

Get this: 'saints' in the Bible means 'the people of God set apart from the world.' We are the saints, not because we have never sinned, nor we are perfect, nor we have done great things, but because we believe in Jesus. We are the saints, because our sins were washed away by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. We are the saints, because we repent our sins and walk in Christ every day. It is the Christ not our own goodness, who makes us saints, holy and righteous before God.

A quick comparison between the Roman Catholic Church's 'sainthood' and that of the Bible.

First, the R.C.'s saints are all in Heaven. You can't be a saint when you are alive. The saints in God's Word, however, are all alive on earth. Next, the R.C.'s saints are beatified/canonized by the Church. The saints in the Bible are made by faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. Thirdly, Catholic folks pray to the saints, but we the believers in Christ pray only to the Father in Heaven. Lastly, the R.C.'s saints, unless they are martyrs, must have performed at least two miracles before they are recognized as saints. We the saints in Christ need no miracles, because we become saints not because of what we have done, but because of what Christ has done on the cross. Any believer is a sinner but a saint at the same time in Christ.

Conclusion

Our Father in Heaven sent His only begotten Son Jesus Christ to take care of the sin of the world (yours and mine included). We enter His Kingdom with faith in Jesus the Messiah through the repentance of our sins. We are the redeemed sinners. We are the saints in Christ. Let us pray.