

The Prodigal's Repentance, Part 1

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If you have your Bible[s], you can turn to Luke 15, where we're continuing to look at the parable of the prodigal son. If you haven't been here the last couple weeks, I have been going through [this section of Luke] at a slower pace. We first surveyed the whole chapter, [looking] at the parables of the lost sheep, [the] lost coin, and then the lost son, or the prodigal son.¹ All three parables were given to address a certain need, or situation, [which occurred] in [Luke 15:]1–2. The scribes and Pharisees were grumbling because tax collectors and sinners were coming to Jesus for salvation. So, Jesus addresses these three parables to confront [those religious leaders], to address their grumbling hearts [and the fact] that they [didn't] like it that these sinners, these tax collectors, who [the religious leaders] believed were traitors and rebels who deserved hell, were actually coming to Jesus.

While all three parables in Luke 15 are similar in some respects, the parable of the prodigal son has a lot of extra detail. As a matter of fact, it paints very vivid detail of quite a few different things. We've been going slower through it just to find out what some of those things are.

This morning I want to read [Luke 15:]11–20. You can follow along as I read.

¹You can read a transcript of this sermon or listen to it by going to the following link:
<http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/Sermons.aspx/audio/sermon/2009/20090111>

And He said, "A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."' So he got up and came to his father.

I didn't plan it this way, it's just what happened when I was studying, [but] I saw six different lies that the prodigal bought into, which caused him to be lost. Then [I noted] six different consequences of his sin, which came upon him because he believed those lies and acted upon them. He suffered [those consequences], which God used to humble him. This morning, [I'm] going to begin to show you the six characteristics of true repentance so that you are not deceived into thinking you have repented if, indeed, you have not, and so that you won't be deceived into thinking others have repented if, indeed, they have not. Keep in mind that [in Luke 15:]17–20a, Jesus is emphasizing what happened from the prodigal's point of view. From [the prodigal's] point of view, he came to his senses.

This is what we want to talk about this morning: [the prodigal's] repentance and [the fact] that repentance is a gift [from] God. If you look at

[Luke 15:]17, it says: “But when he came to his senses. . . .” Just stop there. This is the most significant phrase in the whole parable: “He came to his senses.” This is the turning point. This is the change. This is what brought [the prodigal] around. This is when he stopped and turned from his path of self-destruction. The Greek literally reads, “he came to himself.” He just, in the vernacular, “got a clue.” All of a sudden, he realized, “What am I doing? Why am I here? Why did I hurt my dad? Why did I sin against him? Why did I despise my inheritance, squander my estate, and run away from God? Look at me!” He saw himself. He came to his senses. He got a clue.

Keep in mind that Jesus has crafted this little parable to make the prodigal as odious as possible to the religious leaders. [Jesus] has purposely made the parable [so] that any of the religious leaders, and even most of the Jews, but especially the religious leaders who were grumbling, are going to [think], “Ick!” They’re going to be repulsed. [The prodigal] is going to be the most odious young man they could [imagine]. Look at what he did to his dad! He asked for his inheritance early, and it was like [telling] his dad, “I wish you would drop dead. I wish you were dead.” Not only that, he says, “I want my portion of the inheritance now,” which meant [that] he didn’t care about his land inheritance, which couldn’t be given early—it could only be given after the father’s death—so he was despising his inheritance from the Lord, which, to the Jewish leaders, would have been unthinkable.

Then, having got[ten] the cash in hand, [the prodigal] runs to a distant country, and there he squanders all of his wealth—a horrendous sin—on prostitutes [and] loose living. He plunges himself into sin, and then, becoming impoverished, he goes to work for a *Gentile*, an unclean Gentile, and not only an unclean Gentile, but an unclean Gentile *pig farmer*! At this point [in hearing the parable], the religious leaders [were thinking], “Oh! Oh, this guy should suffer. This guy should suffer big time. I hope this guy gets what’s coming to him.”

The *InterVarsity Press Background Bible Commentary* comments:

At this point, Jesus' Jewish hearers are ready for the story to end (like a similar second-century Jewish story): the son gets what he deserves—he is reduced to the horrendous level of feeding the most unclean of animals. The son is cut off at this point from the Jewish community and any financial charity it would otherwise offer him.²

The Jewish listeners, especially the scribes and Pharisees, are ready for [the words] “and he got what he deserved, Amen.” But suddenly, in an unexpected turn of events, totally out of the blue, right before Jesus says, “And that’s what you get when you sin against God!” Jesus doesn’t say that. Jesus says, “And he came to his senses.” [The prodigal] sees himself as a wretched, rebellious, disrespectful, unloving, spoiled brat. He has plunged himself into a life of wanton pleasure, estranged himself from his family [and] his Jewish community, [and] sinned against God, but now he has come to his senses. How in the world did that happen? He sees himself rightly. He turns away from his sin. He goes back to his father. Do you know what this is called? Repentance. He repented.

Geldenhuis, in his commentary on Luke, summarizes the prodigal’s repentance well:

Finally disillusioned by the unpleasant experiences in the “far” country, he realizes how foolishly he acted in tearing himself away from his father. Mindful of the conditions existing in his father’s house, he now sees his own state of misery in all its naked reality.

The first step toward true repentance is that a man should become conscious of the misery into which he has fallen in the

²Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), n.p.

far country of sin—that he should see himself as he is in his intrinsic [need] and shameful defilement.³

This is exactly what happens. It's important to note at this point something about the three parables. The first two parables have this basic motif: something is lost, sought after, and found. The shepherd searches for the lost sheep, finds [it], and recovers it. The woman loses the coin in the dust of the floor, sweeps the floor [while] holding a lamp, [and] recovers [the coin]. But what about the prodigal? Does the father say, "OK, get a search party [together]. We're sweeping the Mediterranean world to find him, wherever he went. Go out and look for him. I'm going out to look for him. We've got to bring him back!" Does that happen? No. [The father] waits. He waits patiently for his son to return, and so there seems to be this huge difference between recovering the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son.

But the difference is only apparent; it is not real. Why? [It is] because in order for a sinner to come to repentance, a certain sequence of divine events must take place, or that person will never come to salvation. You say, "Well, what are those?" I'm going to tell you. [The] first [divine event is that] one must be chosen by God unto salvation before the foundation of the world [see Ephesians 1:4]. There are some who just don't like this doctrine. I had somebody come up after the [first] service, and say, "You know, I'm just glad that God has chosen everyone."

I said, "No, He hasn't. He has only chosen some, and they're described as the 'few,' not the many."

"Well, I just don't think it's fair."

"If you want fair, then you want hell because hell is fair, but grace is gracious."

"Why would we share our faith if God already knows who He's going to save?"

³Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, The New International Commentary on the New Testament Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975 [reprint]), p. 407.

“It’s not so *you* can save them. Is that why you share your faith? So you can save people? No, you share your faith so God can save people because He uses the means of the gospel.”

“Why pray if God already knows who He is going to save?”

“Well, because God tells you to, and He is God. [He] wants to get Himself glory when He answers your prayers.”

“Yes, but, I just have a problem with that. Doesn’t God say in His Word that all, if they believe, can [be saved] [see Romans 3:22]?”

“Yes, the gospel is given to all, but never confuse a universal call to all men as universal predestination. The Bible never says that.”

The first thing that must happen in the sequence of events leading up to somebody’s repentance is they must be chosen before the foundation of the world. Listen to what Paul says in Ephesians 1:3–5. He says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,” now listen here, “just as He,” that is, God, “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,” and just so [you] aren’t confused here, you weren’t born then, “that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention” here it is, “of His will.” Then, in [Ephesians 1:]11, it goes on to say: “Also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.”

Paul, encouraging the Thessalonian believers says, in 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14:

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God calls us. God predestines us. I mean, people, if you can't figure that one out, OK, but don't deny it. God does not choose everybody to eternal life, but all He chooses come.

You think, "Who are the chosen?" Well, believe and then you'll know you're one of them. A lot of people get all hung up on this, and say, "What about all the unbelievers in the world?" What about them? Preach the gospel to all creation, to every person [see Mark 16:15]. "But what if they aren't predestined?" Well, that's not for you to know. It's for you to pray for them [and] witness to them, [but] for *God* to save them. Once they are saved, the doctrine of predestination is there to encourage [them]. What torments us is when we take [that] doctrine and we try to apply it to unbelievers, [which is] something the Bible never does. [If] you do that, you'll just torture yourself on the rack of your own mental griefs, trying to figure out, "OK, how does this work? Should I witness to that guy? I wonder if he's predestined or not." Share the gospel with him. If he comes to Christ, you'll know he is [predestined].

"What if *I'm* not predestined?" Well, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you'll be saved, and you'll know you're predestined.

"Well, what if *I'm* not?" Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Well, what if *I'm* not?" Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, and then God will say, "By the way, I chose you."

I'm sorry if that doesn't work for you. It's what the Scriptures teach, and we err if we say, "It's not true because it scares me." We err if we say, "We don't have to believe." The Bible says, "Believe, and once you believe, you've been predestined." That's what it teaches. That's what we receive. There's no excuse, no justification, for rejecting Christ. Can you imagine standing before Christ on judgment day, saying, "Listen, I couldn't have believed because you didn't predestine me." No, He's going to say, "No, you didn't believe because you didn't want Me. You rejected Me. You ran from Me. You wouldn't submit to Me. That's why you're being judged." Of course, all those who are saved are going to be saved because God saved them and chose them before the foundation of the world.

In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas are preaching the gospel at Pisidian Antioch [and] a bunch of people come to Christ. This is how Luke describes what happened: “When the Gentiles heard this,” the gospel, “they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed” [Acts 13:48]. That’s pretty clear, isn’t it? “As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” So, why do I bring this up? Well, the prodigal in the story, when he comes to his senses, there is a reason [he does so]. It is because God, before the foundation of the world, chose him [for] adoption as [a] son [see Ephesians 1:5].

[The] second [divine event is that] Jesus needed to die for our sins and be resurrected from the dead to provide that necessary sacrifice and atonement for sin so that we can be saved. Just repenting and believing in Jesus without the death of Christ would be no good. There would be no gospel if Jesus didn’t die and rise again. You remember what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4. He says:

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

That is a necessary thing. [In] 1 Peter 3:18, Peter says the same thing in a smaller form: “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.” God needed to be born into this world in the person of Jesus Christ. God had to send His only begotten Son, God in human flesh, Jesus [see John 3:16], to be born of a virgin [see Isaiah 7:14], to live a perfect life [see Hebrews 4:15], to die on the cross for our sins [see

1 Peter 2:24], to be buried and resurrected on the third day so that we can be saved [see 1 Peter 1:3]. That is the ground of our salvation.

Paul reminds Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:3–6:

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all.

Jesus is the Savior of the world, and He is the only Savior who is offered. He is the only Savior. In Hebrews 2:9, it says Jesus tasted “death for everyone.” Isaiah says it this way: “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 53:6]. He is the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” [John 1:29]. If sinner[s] could come to their senses; if sinner[s] could, on their own power, resurrect themselves from their spiritually dead state; if they could seek Christ, believe in Him, trust in Him, and cling to Him with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength on their own, apart from the grace of God, but Jesus never died, and never resurrected from the dead, they couldn’t be saved. It *had* to happen. It is the point in history that *had* to happen. All the Old Testament saints were saved looking forward to what Christ would do, and all those on this side of the cross are saved because they look back to what Christ did. Christ *had* to die so that anyone who gets saved gets saved through that work.

The Apostle John says in 1 John 2:2: “And He Himself,” speaking of Jesus, “is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.” This word “propitiation,” [which] is probably not a commonly used word for most of you, means “that which satisfies the wrath of God; a sacrifice that satisfies the wrath of God.” You could read [this verse] this way: “And He Himself is the sacrifice [that] satisfies the wrath of God for our sins and not for ours only but for those of the whole

world.” This doesn’t mean that everybody is saved, obviously, because they are not, but it does mean that He is the one who is offered to the whole world as the only one who *can* save anyone who believes. He is the one who is the propitiation, and He offers Himself, [saying], “Come to Me.” Jesus calls sinners to repentance. If you are a sinner, you are being called to repentance. The call to the gospel is universal. It means [that] Jesus is offered and presented to all men as the only sacrifice that can satisfy the wrath of God. This has to happen before anyone can come to [his] senses and be saved.

[The] third [divine event is that] the Father must orchestrate us coming in contact with the gospel and giving us a clue, so to speak, so that we see our condition and [then] desire to be saved. That is a work of God. When we look at [our salvation] from our perspective, what do we think? We think, “There was a point in my life [at which] I kind of got interested in religion. I just wasn’t feeling good. I was burnt out on sin and the world. So, I started talking to a Christian friend,” or “started going to church,” or “looking up different religions,” “and eventually I discovered that Christianity was the true religion. I understood the gospel. After having come to that understanding, I decided to give my life to Christ.” That would be a totally true statement from the human perspective. That would be like saying, “The prodigal came to his senses,” because he did. He himself came to his senses, but it wasn’t he *by himself*.

With each sin, we basically dig a hole that goes all the way to hell. We’ve dug a lot of dirt out of that hole, and then we just jump into it. “Spiritually dead” is what the Scriptures describe us as, [which] means you can’t do anything spiritual [see 1 Corinthians 2:14]. Just like a physically dead person can’t do anything physical, a spiritually dead person can’t do anything spiritual. You can’t go to the morgue and talk to a guy who is on one of those cold steel things, [saying], “How are you doing? Put ‘er there. Give me five. Can you wiggle your toe? Can you blink your eye? Can you nod?” No. [There is] no response. Why? [It is because he is] physically dead. So, when someone doesn’t know Christ, the Bible describes [him]

as spiritually dead in trespasses and sins [see Ephesians 2:1], which means whenever it comes to anything spiritual, [he] can't respond.

Well, the gospel is spiritual. Coming to salvation is about as spiritual as you can get. This creates a tension in a lot of peoples' minds. [They think], "What are you saying? Are you saying that if I'm spiritually dead I can't be saved? Well, then, how did I get saved?" Turn to John 6. Jesus, here, is describing [how] He is the bread of life. In [John 6:]35, He says: "I am the bread of life." So He is using this analogy of the manna [that] fell from heaven so that the Israelites could eat that manna and live [see John 6:31]. Jesus, [who is] come down out of heaven [is], figuratively speaking, the bread—manna—of life, and anybody who receives Him is going to live also, but not just physically and temporarily, but for eternity. Look at [John 6:]37. I just want you to think through these things. Notice what He says: "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." It's not a hard Scripture to interpret. It says [that] every single—all, every, and each—person that the Father gives to Jesus will, for certain, come to Him, and Jesus isn't going to cast them out. That's pretty clear. That's about as clear as you can get.

Look down at [John 6:]44. Jesus goes on to say, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." Notice again: How many people seek God? None. That's why Paul says in Romans [that] there are how many who seek God? None. "No, not even one," in case you didn't hear the first one. Not even one [see Romans 3:10–12]. No one seeks after God. You say, "OK, I see this. I see here that if the Father does give someone to Jesus [that person] come[s] and [is] not cast out. I also see here from [John 6:]44 that no one can even come to the Father unless He draws him," drags him. This is the term used for pulling mules along with a rope—"pulls him." If the Father does lasso you with His grace, and if He does draw you to Christ, you will be saved and resurrected on the last day. Phew. That's good.

Look at [John 6:]47. Notice also [that] Jesus doesn't just throw away human responsibility here. He doesn't say, "You don't have to do anything.

Just live your life and God will reach down from heaven and swoop you up.” No. He says: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.” So, now, we also see that we have to believe. We need to believe. You think, “OK, OK, OK. We [have] to believe, but we can’t. Is that what you’re saying?” I’m just reading the verses. “You have to believe but you can’t. OK, but if God gives you to Christ you’re going to come, which means you’re going to believe, and no one can come because no one wants believe, unless God draws [him] by grace, and then [he] come[s], and then [he does] believe because God draws [him] by grace. Is that what you’re saying?” Yeah, well, that’s what the Bible says.

Look at [John 6:]51: He also says, “I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread,” notice there is volition involved—you *choose* to eat the bread—which [means], figuratively speaking, [that] you choose to receive Christ, partake of Christ. Is it just God’s sovereignty? No. Is it just man’s will? No. It is God’s sovereignty enabling man’s will. Look down at [John 6:]65: “And He was saying, ‘For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.’ ” You can’t come. You won’t come. You think, “Oh, man, that is radical!” So, why do [I] bring this up? [I bring this up] because no one ever comes to [his] senses unless God the Father first draws [him] to be given to Jesus.

[The] fourth [divine event is that] the Holy Spirit must open our hearts to the truth—illumine our minds to the gospel—so that the scales fall off our eyes [see Acts 9:18], so that we see our spiritual blindness and it departs, and all of a sudden the cloud is gone, and we come to our senses like a man who awakens in a house that is on fire. We bolt up in bed, look around, and realize, “My house is on fire! I’m going to perish!” Then all of a sudden we look, and there is Jesus. Run for the fire escape! We bolt for Christ. Believe me, when we bolt for Christ and we get outside the house, and we see it just engulfed in flames, we don’t [say], “I wish I could go back in there.” When we leave, we don’t want to go back. When we turn from that house on fire, when the Holy Spirit illumines our minds to the truth, we’re

like the prodigal who came to his senses, and thought, “What am I doing here? How did I get here? Look at what I’ve done! Ah! I’m going back to Dad!” He turn[ed] around and [went] home, and he never [went] back [to the land of sin].

You say, “Well, how does this happen? How does somebody get [awakened] out of [his] spiritual death slumber? When [his] house is on fire, how do[es he] get to the place where [he] get[s] a clue?” Jesus, speaking of the Holy Spirit, who would be given at Pentecost, says in John 16:8: “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.” You remember what happened at Pentecost, right? All these Jews were [there] to celebrate the feast. They weren’t [there] to receive Jesus as the Messiah. All of a sudden, the apostles start[ed] preaching, and what happen[ed]? The Holy Spirit [was] poured out. Then what happen[ed]? [The Jews were] broken, and they all realize[d], “Oh, no! We crucified our own Messiah!” Thousands [were] converted because the Holy Spirit [was] poured out on them. The Holy Spirit reveals to you that you are a sinner. It gives you spiritual sight. It helps you see the condition you were in.

I have seen people who were so hardened to sin they were just hardened, and hardened, and hardened. You try to explain [their spiritual state] to them, [but they would just say], “I’m a good person.” [But], all of a sudden there [wa]s a point in their [lives at which] they [were] broken. I’ve seen people that literally looked like there was an invisible hand that had them by the neck, and was shaking them. I’ve seen [people] trembling, their whole body quaking, unto repentance, when God broke them. If you were to ask those people, “What’s wrong?” oh, man, they just see themselves like they’re covered with tar. [They would say], “I am such a sinner! I can see I’m in trouble. I’m headed for hell!” They’re traumatized. I’ve had people tell me, “I [was] sitting [in] my office,” or “I [was] sitting at home,” or “I [was] sitting on my bed, and all of a sudden I realize[d] [that] I [was] going to hell. [I knew that] I [had] sinned against God and I [was] going to hell.” They [then came] to their senses. It’s not that they weren’t going to hell

before that, but all of a sudden, they [came] to their senses. How does that happen? [It happens] by the Holy Spirit.

I want you to turn to 1 Corinthians 2:14. I want to just show you something here. Paul describes the unbeliever as the “natural man,” and [Paul] says this: “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.” Obviously, the natural man doesn’t have the Holy Spirit—he is spiritually dead—so he can’t appraise spiritual things. It’s like trying to receive reception on your radio, but you unplug it [first]. Turn the knob all you want, nothing is coming in: There is no power there. You cannot receive any signal. So it is with the unbeliever. He is spiritually dead. He *cannot* understand the things of the spirit. He can’t do it. In the Greek, it literally says, “He does not have the *dunamis*, the power, the dynamite within him, to bring himself to an experiential knowledge of the truth.” He cannot do it.

I don’t know about you, but [I think] that puts unbelievers in a seriously bad spot. You say, “[Is] Paul saying here that an unbeliever can’t understand the gospel?” That is exactly what he says here. Exactly. [The unbeliever] cannot do it. You think, “Then how does anyone get saved? How did the Corinthian believers get saved?” Look at [1 Corinthians 2:]10. Paul says how [unbelievers can get saved]: “For to us,” believers who have come to their senses, “God revealed them” things of the gospel, “through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.”

For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. [1 Corinthians 2:11–13]

Did you see that? How does a believer ever come to be a believer if he cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God? [He comes] because the Holy Spirit comes upon [him], and says, "I'm going to give you understanding because on your own you don't have the power within yourself to understand the things of God. But now I'm going to give you that ability so you can see what's going on in your life, like a man who wakes up in a house on fire, like the prodigal who, in that far country of sin, comes to his senses, and [says], 'What am I doing here?'" You can't come to your senses unless the Holy Spirit first is working in your life to bring you to that place.

[The] fifth [divine event is that] God must even supply us with the faith we need to believe. John says in John 1:12–13:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Notice here that God gives us the *right* to become children of God and to believe in His name. We are not born by our own will, but by His will. In Ephesians 2:8 (we know that one), [it says]: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Philippians 1:29 [says]: "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." Who grants us the ability to believe? God [does]. The prodigal, like all sinners who come to faith in Jesus Christ, who come to their senses, who finally realize, "I've got to go back to the Father. He is the one who will take care of me, He is the one that I need," c[a]me to that place because the Holy Spirit [was] working in [his] life to bring [him] to that place where [he] realize[d], "I've got to get out of here and go the other way."

[Now we get to the] sixth [divine event that must occur in order for a person to come to salvation]. [It is] the main point, the big idea, of [Luke

15:]17–20, and this is the whole idea of repentance. The phrase, “he came to his senses,” really means [the prodigal] repented. He g[ot] a clue, turn[ed] around, and [went] the other way. He [went] back, he repent[ed]. [“Repent”] means “to turn around.” It literally means “to have a change of mind, an about-face of mind, to realize that you’re doing what’s wrong, that you need to go in the other direction.” It’s not only a change of mind, [not] just a mental thing only. It is a mental thing that also changes the way you live because your heart directs your life, and when you repent from the heart, your life changes with it. You can’t say, “Repentance is just a change of mind. It’s just agreeing with God that you’re a sinner. You can keep living with your girlfriend, you can keep worshipping Molech [see Leviticus 20:2], you can keep bowing down to Dagon [see Judges 16:23], you can keep worshipping Satan as long as you agree that it’s wrong.” No. No, that’s not how it works.

Do you remember what John the Baptist and Jesus both said? “Bring forth fruit in” what? “keeping with repentance” [Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8]. Even repentance itself is a gift of God. A lot of people say things like, “Well, you can’t tell people to repent and believe because if you tell them to repent, that’s a human work.” A lot of people think repentance is [to] clean up your act so that God will accept you. No. That’s just being a moralist. Some people think that repentance is what you do, and then faith is what God does. No. God grants you repentance *and* grants you faith, and then you respond to the grace given to you.

It’s like this: Why isn’t faith a work? We’re called to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” [Ephesians 2:8]. We are saved by our work of faith, so why isn’t faith a work? It’s because faith is granted. You just saw that, right? God gives us the faith we need to believe. That is why we need to realize that repentance is also granted to us from God, and when God gives us that repentance, then we respond by turning away [from our sin to faith in Him]. Listen, you can’t just say, “I’ve repented, but I’m not leaving my

sin. I'm staying in the house. I'm going down in flames. I'm not leaving the country of sin. I'm just going to let you know, I've agreed mentally [about my sin]." No, you need to "bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance" [Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8]. You need to let go of, turn your back on, release, forsake your life.

That is why Isaiah says what he [does] in Isaiah 55:6–7: "Let the wicked forsake his way," how he lives, "And the unrighteous man his thoughts," how he thinks, "And let him return," or repent, "to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon." You must repent of your ways and your actions—it's not just a mental exercise. Twice Jesus says in Luke 13:3, 5: "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." What do you mean to tell me that you don't need to repent? Jesus preached repentance [and] John the Baptist preached repentance. Jesus said, "[If] you don't repent you're going to perish." Paul preached repentance. What do you mean you don't need to repent?

See, the problem is, a lot of people see repentance as this additional thing. You're saved by grace through faith alone, and there is no repentance alone. But you know what? When you read the Bible, what do you see? Sometimes the Bible says, "Repent!" and that's all. Sometimes the Bible says, "Believe!" and that's all. And sometimes the Bible says, "Repent and believe!" and that's all [see Mark 1:15]. You say, "Well, which one is it?" Yes! You see, faith is what positively grabs onto, receives, clings to, trusts in Jesus Christ. Repentance is what negatively lets go of, turns from, releases [your sinful ways]. Repentance is what you turn from to have faith in Christ.

Edwin Orr explains it this way, in a very succinct and, I think, good way:

Does "repent and believe the gospel" imply that the sinner must do two things to be saved, and not one only? The exhortation is really only one requirement. The instruction, "Leave London and go to Los Angeles," sounds like a two-fold request, but it

really is only one; it is impossible to go to Los Angeles without leaving London.⁴

Obviously, you cannot keep worshipping Satan and then receive Christ. You *have* to repent. That's why the Scriptures say, "Repent," because if you repent, you will believe, and if you believe, you have to repent. It's just two different aspects of the action that must occur in order for someone to be saved.

I know there are people [thinking], "I just have a problem with that because it seems like you're adding [to salvation] something that *you* do." We're not saying, "Clean up your act so you can be saved." That's not what the Scriptures teach. That's not what repentance is. Repentance is the divine act of God [that] causes you to turn from your sin and believe. You think, "Well, does the Bible say that?" Let me just tell you what it says. [In] Acts 5:31, Peter is talking to the Jews about Jesus, and he says this: "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior," here it is, "to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Repentance was granted to Israel for the forgiveness of sins. In Acts 11:17[-18], Peter returns to Jerusalem to tell the others how the Gentiles were saved. The text says: "Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ," they received the Holy Spirit, too, "who was I that I could stand in God's way? When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.'"

Paul, in Romans 2:4, says that it is the kindness of God that leads you to repentance. In 2 Timothy 2:[24–25], Paul talks to Timothy about those who oppose his ministry, and he says: Be "patient when wronged," why? "with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth."

"So, are you telling me that God grants you repentance?" That's exactly what I'm telling you that the Word of God teaches: God gives you repen-

⁴Quoted in *N.C.B.S.I. & Q*, 662.

tance, just like He gives you faith, just like He opens your mind, just like He chooses you before the foundation of the world, just like He draws you to Himself. All of this must happen before you come to your senses. Repentance is a gift of God's grace. That's why it's not a work of man. It's a work of God *in* man, and then we respond by coming to our senses.

[If] you're sitting out there, [and] you're the prodigal son, the prodigal daughter, the prodigal husband, the prodigal wife, the prodigal grandmother or grandfather, or uncle—whoever you are—the question is this: Are you still living in that far country of sin or have you come to your senses? If you're sitting there [thinking], “Oh, by the grace of God I've come to my senses,” then you need to praise Him for that. You need to thank Him for that. [Before the Lord works in our lives], we don't even know what's going on. All we know is we get saved, and we think it's so cool. It's not until we study the Scriptures that we realize, “Whoa! I was in really bad condition! If God hadn't chosen me; if God hadn't awakened me; if God hadn't drawn me; if God hadn't opened my eyes; if God hadn't given me the faith; if God hadn't granted me repentance, I would still be on my way to hell!”

The God who is rich in mercy and grace awakens sinners, and they come to their senses. If you are sitting out there this morning, and you realize, “Whoa! That is me. My house is on fire. I'm living in the far country of sin. I need Jesus,” then run to Christ! Don't just say, “I believe in Jesus.” The *demons* believe in Jesus [see James 2:19]. I mean trust Christ, receive Christ as your Savior, believe in Him as the only one who can save you from your sins because you need [to be] saved from your sins. You're going to [let go of the] control of your life; you're going to die to self; you're going to take up your cross [see Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23]; you're going to turn your back on your old style of life, and you're going to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior, your Lord, your Master, and your King to live for Him from now on, forever, never again to return to the house that is on fire. That is repentance. [There is] none of this, “I do want to be saved, but could you just give me an asbestos suit so I can still live there?” No! There are

no asbestos suits. You either leave that country and flee to Christ, or you go down in flames with the whole world. Those are the only two options.

God says to you in Acts 17:30–31:

Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.

You know who that is: It's Jesus. Jesus is the Savior, right now, to you. If you reject Him, He will be Judge later, and there will be no escaping. So, if you see your sins, if God has awakened you, if you realize, "I've got to do something," then do it right now. Ask Christ to save you. Ask Christ to change your life, to forgive you of your sins. Trust in Christ alone, who died on the cross so that you could believe in Him and be saved by what *He* did not by what *you* do.

When prodigals come to their senses, they come to their senses and they turn, and they believe because God is working behind the scenes. This is what you don't see in the parable of the prodigal, which means [that as] the shepherd goes out and finds the sheep and retrieves it [and] the woman sweeps the floor and finds the coin, [so] God does all of these things to bring prodigals home.

That is the first point of the six [characteristics of true repentance]. (There was a moan! I just couldn't go any farther [today]. I'm sorry. That's just the way it is. Maybe we'll do the other five next time. Miracles do happen.) If you don't know Christ as your Savior, you're dabbling in sin, you kind of want to appease your conscience, [and you think], "I'm going to go to church [and] massage my conscience because maybe if I just give a little money, or maybe if I hang around other Christians it will make God like me," [I want you to know that] it won't. It won't make Him like you. Or, [if you're thinking], "Maybe if I give a lot of money, then He'll like me." No,

He won't. Maybe if you sacrifice one of your children? No, it won't work. That's exactly what Micah says: "Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, In ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" [Micah 6:7]. No. There's only one thing that works: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. It's Christ and Christ alone. He is the ground, the Savior, the propitiation, not only for [the] sins [of] those who believe, but [for] those of the whole world. Come to Christ and He will save you. Reject Him, you'll be judged forever. That is the message. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your Word, and we thank You for the picture here of this young man totally submerged in sin, in a far away country, having wandered so far away from his earthly home and heavenly Father, and yet in an unexpected turn of events, by Your grace, from what we have learned from Your Word, You brought him to his senses. Father, may we leave here today praising You and thanking You for those of us who have been brought to our senses and drawn, by Your grace, to Jesus Christ. Father, if there [are people] here this morning who ha[ve] never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who ha[ve] never trusted Christ as their Savior, who ha[ve] only given Him lip service, and just a shallow profession, [who don't] really love the Lord, may You break them, may You humble them, and may You bring them to a place of absolute certain surety that they are on their way to heaven because they have a transformed life and are bringing forth fruit in keeping with true repentance. Father, we ask this knowing that only You can do it. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

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