

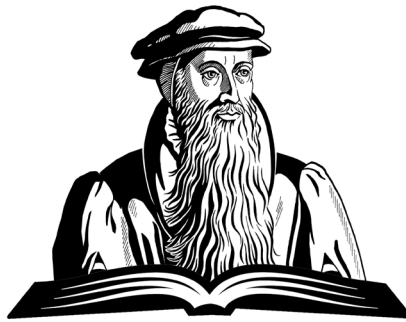
VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

The Application of Redemption

by Rev. William Macleod

Lecture 5

Repentance



**The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education**

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

John Knox Institute of Higher Education

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Rev. William Macleod recently retired, after serving as minister of the gospel for 45 years at Knightswood Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), in Glasgow, Scotland. In addition, he was for many years the editor of the denominational magazine, *The Free Church Witness*. He was also Professor of Systematic Theology and Principal of the Free Church (Continuing) Seminary, in Inverness, Scotland. He is married and has three adult children and six grandchildren.

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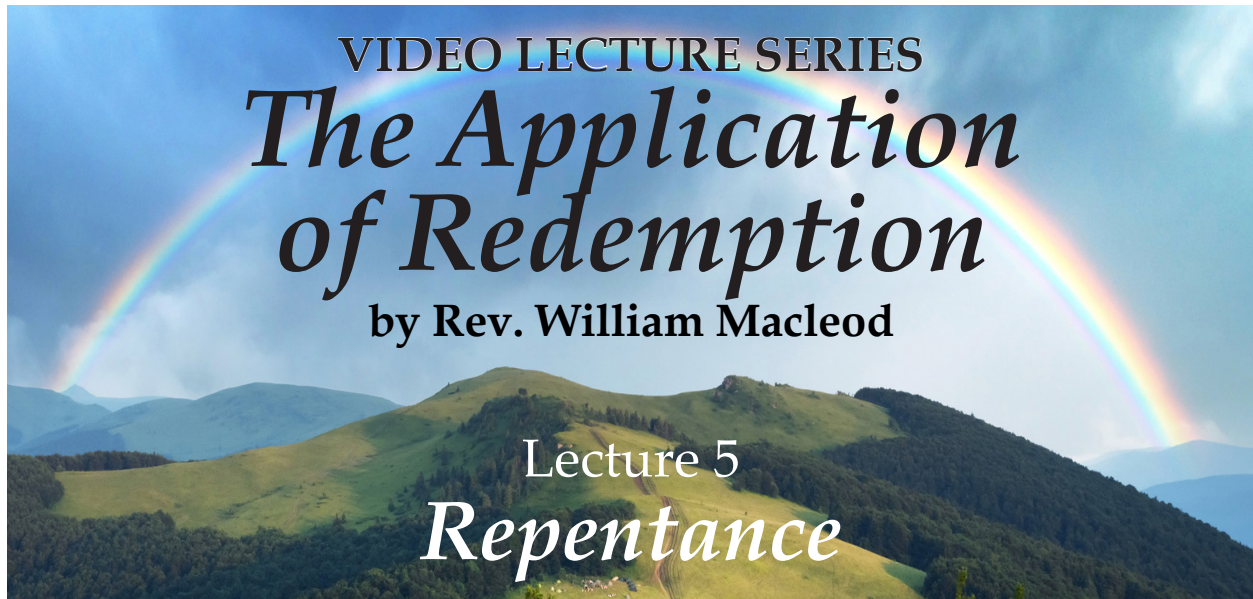
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The Application of Redemption

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12 Lectures

1. The Order of Salvation
2. Total Depravity
3. Effectual Calling
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Our lecture today is on *Repentance*. Repentance is very closely related to Faith. They are like two sides of the one coin. Repentance is turning away from sin, and faith is turning to God. Which comes first? Logically, turning from sin takes place before turning to Christ. However, there can be no truly turning from sin until we come to the cross. It is only in the light of the cross that we see the real wickedness of sin. Faith is essential to true repentance. It is only in the light of Christ's sufferings that your repentance is an evangelical repentance, rather than a legal one. Further, you can't have a saving faith without repentance. It must be a repentant faith and a believing repentance—you cannot separate the two.

So what is Repentance? Repentance is a radical change of life and behavior. It is a change of views—intellectually, a change of feelings—emotional, and a change of purpose—volitional, with respect to God, to self, to sin, and salvation. *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, as usual, gives an excellent definition. What is repentance? The answer is, “Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience”—that’s the answer to Question #87. So repentance is a Scriptural command. The command to repent is found often in the Old Testament. Isaiah exclaims, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55, verse 7). Ezekiel cries, “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33, verse 11). Zechariah pleads with Judah in God’s name: “Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD” (Zechariah 1, verse 4). Repentance was the characteristic note of the preaching of John the Baptist: “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3, verse 2). Jesus actually proclaimed the same message: “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4, verse 17). Peter, on the day of Pentecost, preached, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2, verse 38). Paul, at Athens, declared that “God...commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17, verse 30). All are to repent and to turn to Christ for forgiveness.

Repentance is unto Life. Though we were created in the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, we “sinned in [Adam], and fell with him, in his first transgression”—answer to Question #16 of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. We are born in sin and “shapen in iniquity” (Psalm 51, verse 5). We are, by nature, sinners under the wrath and curse of God, and are on our way to hell. We are on the broad road that leads to destruction, and need to turn in to the narrow way which leads to heaven (Matthew 7, verses 13 and 14). Repentance is unto life. Without repentance, we go on in sin and perish.

Repentance is a Saving Grace. “Grace” means “gift,” and so a saving grace is a gift that leads to salvation. Grace also has the idea that it is a gift to those who do not deserve it. Further, it is not something we can produce by human resolution. There can be sorrow for the consequences of sin, as well as the case of “Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears” (Hebrews 12, verses 16 and 17). Actually, the repentance which Esau failed to obtain was his father’s repentance of giving Jacob the blessing. Esau wanted his father to repent and give the blessing to him. He was a profane man, and what he sought was earthly and material blessings. The early Christians spoke of repentance as a gift. For example, in Acts 11:18, “When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”

It is an Evangelical Grace. We might think of repentance as a kind of penance, feeling sorry for what we have done. It is sometimes regarded as something that we can work up and perform. It is certainly our duty to repent. Peter preached, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3, verse 19). We must repent, yet, like every other part of salvation, it is “not of works lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2, verse 9). There is a legalistic repentance, a remorse such as Judas had when he returned the money for betraying Christ and went away and hanged himself. And that’s in contrast to the evangelical repentance which Peter had when he wept bitterly and came back to Christ for having denied the Lord.

It’s to be Preached by every gospel minister. Every sound minister should start his preaching of the gospel by explaining man’s need because of his sin, and God’s wrath against sin. He must proclaim the law, and should seek, with the help of the Spirit, to convict his hearers of their sin. Then he calls to repentance and faith. It is not something that a man can do with his own willpower. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?” (Jeremiah 13, verse 23). But yet, it is the duty of all to repent, and is to be pressed upon every individual, with a conviction of helplessness and hopelessness, God is usually pleased to grant the gifts of faith and repentance. Paul can say, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1, verse 16).

A True Sense of Sin is Required. In order truly to repent, a sinner must be convicted of sin. No true repentance or conversion can take place without it. This conviction is not just a fear of hell, but a genuine hatred for sin, as that which is obnoxious to God. It was our sin that crucified Christ. A sight of our sin should make us aware of our danger. There is a judgment day coming, when sinners will be punished. Indeed, sometimes God begins the punishment, even in this life: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1, verse 18). Also, sin is filthy and disgusting to the holy nature of God. It is directly contrary to his righteous law. Some consciousness of this is essential to repentance. David came to an awareness of this when he exclaimed, “For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done

this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest” (Psalm 51, verses 3 and 4).

An Apprehension of the Mercy of God is Required. If there is no sense of mercy being available, despair will be outcome, as was the case with Judas Iscariot. He went and committed suicide, which is the consequence of loss of any hope. But God encourages faith and hope: “Come now, let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1, verse 18). How encouraging are Paul’s words! “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1, verse 15). We must have a grasp of the mercy of God in Christ. Peter, who denied Jesus, did not despair. David committed adultery and murder, yet ye repented and found forgiveness. Paul asserted, “Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Corinthians 7, verse 10). There are two very different kinds of sorrow: one unto salvation, and the other unto despair. The rich young ruler was very sorrowful, yet went away from Christ grieved (Matthew 10, verse 22).

Mercy in Christ. God is merciful to sinners, but there is no mercy apart from Christ. Outside of Christ, God, in justice, is full of wrath against the wicked. God, in his love, elected men and women in Christ. Viewing them in Christ is so he sees no iniquity in Jacob, nor perverseness in Israel (Numbers 23, verse 21). Every blessing that we enjoy comes to us as a result of the Lord Jesus earning it for us on the cross. Christ bore our sins and suffered the penalty due to us.

Grief for Sin. Sin against God is truly heinous and wicked. How awful to rebel against God, the God who created us! Disobedience against the good God, who, in providence, provides all things in rich abundance for us, is a great evil. Sinning against our heavenly Father, and our loving, suffering Savior is the height of wickedness. In the light of who God is and what he has done, we must grieve over sin. “Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Corinthians 7, verse 10).

Hatred for Sin is Required. True repentance arises when we hate sin. When we see sin in the light of the cross, we realize that Christ was scourged by sin. Sin nailed Christ to the tree and kept him there. Aware of this, we will detest sin. We love Christ because he first loved us. Loving Christ, we will hate what made him suffer. Worldly people love sins, but are restrained by what other people will say, or by the fear of punishment. But the motive of the Christian is love. One of the things that makes heaven a delightful prospect for the child of God is the fact that we will never sin again. Pride, lust, and anger will never again have a place in our hearts. Will that not be wonderful?

We Must Turn from Sin unto God. The repentant sinner must turn from sin in general, but also from specific sins. The Thessalonians were clearly real Christians, because they “turned to God from idols to serve the living the true God” (1 Thessalonians 1, verse 9). There is a positive side to this turning, as well as a negative. The individual strives with all his might, and by God’s grace, to live a holy, God-honoring life.

Conversion is Vital to Salvation. A huge change must take place. A Christian is known by his fruits, that is, by his transformed and holy life. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5, verse 17). Egypt is left behind, and its fleshpots are no longer desired. If a professing Christian is living just like the world, it shows that he is a mere hypocrite. It is not our baptism or our words which prove who is a true Christian, but our godly lives. And there must be a purposing to walk in God’s way. The

Christian endeavors and purposes to talk with God in the way of his commandments. There is a desire and a will on our part to walk with God. We now “delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Romans 7, verse 22). We have died to sin. True, a battle continues: “I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” But then, the Apostle adds, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” That’s from Romans 7, verses 23 to 25. We need grace to do what we desire to do, and God gives us that grace. We are told that Enoch walked with God, and we long to do that as well.

We Cannot Trust in Our Repentance. Repentance is essential, and all sinners must repent to be saved, yet, we cannot rest on our repentance as a satisfaction for sin. Many Jews think that God will take their repentance as satisfaction for sin. Muslims have a similar idea—if they repent, Allah will be merciful to them. Roman Catholics, too put a stress upon penance as an earning forgiveness. Forgiveness, however, is only given for Christ’s sake. ‘Tis only because he has sacrificed himself for us, suffered for us, and satisfied the demands of God’s law by his death, that we are pardoned.

Sin Deserves Hell. No sin is so small but that it deserves eternal punishment. In fact, the only small sin is a sin against a small god. Because God is so great, and so good, every single sin is exceeding wicked and deserves eternity in hell. On the other hand, there is no sin so great as will damn the sinner who truly repents and believes in Jesus. The Bible talks of the “unforgivable sin,” but this refers to a rejection, and indeed, a persistent rejection of the testimony of the Holy Spirit to Christ (Luke 12, verse 10). The writer to the Hebrews, in chapter 6, describes those apostates who cannot be brought back and restored. He is referring to people who have turned away from Christ after having had many privileges and blessings. They are guilty of crucifying the Son of God a second time, trampling the blood of Christ under foot (Hebrews 10, verse 29). They are hardened and careless. The sensitive penitent, who fears having committed this sin, and longs for peace with God, is not an apostate.

Men Should Not be Content with General Repentance. Every sin should bother us. It’s not just at the beginning of the Christian life that we are to repent. We should be daily repenting. Every day, we are to be repenting and believing the gospel. Jesus taught us to pray, “Forgive us our debts” (Matthew 6, verse 12). This should be, for us, our way of life. When Christ preached, in the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are they that mourn” (Matthew 5:4), he was describing a daily lifestyle. We should confess every sin, and seek forgiveness. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John chapter 1, verse 9).

Confess Your Faults to One Another. Just as we are to confess our faults to God, so we are to confess to one another the sins we commit against each other (James 5, verse 16). We should not let the sun go down upon our wrath (Ephesians 4, verse 26). If someone sins against us, we should go to see them privately, show them their fault, and lovingly try to bring them to repentance (Luke 17, verse 3). Those who sin against the church and bring shame on the church are to be dealt with privately at first, to seek confession and repentance. If they repent, discipline may still be necessary, for a public or a scandalous fault. But we have a duty, in love, to seek to restore such (Matthew chapter 18, verses 15 to 20).

Repentance is a Great Duty. In Paul’s wonderful sermon on Mars Hill, he referred to the ignorance and idolatry of the Greeks and other nations in the past. But now, a new day is dawned. The gospel is not just for the Jews, but “God commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17, verse 30). Sinners are to repent and believe the gospel. Christians are daily to repent of their sins. It is true that all our sins are forgiven when we are justified, yet, repentance is commanded.

Repentance will only cease to be necessary when we cease to sin. If we do not repent of our sins, there is no promise of forgiveness. Sin will bring chastisement upon the child of God, and that is painful. God is teaching us to hate sin as he hates it.