

The Gift of Repentance  
Andrew Kneeland, March 20, 2022  
1 Corinthians 10:1-13

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

What's the best gift you've ever received? Concert tickets? A new bicycle?  
Maybe a sweater that fit perfectly?

Everyone loves to receive gifts, don't they? We all know that excitement that comes from ripping open packaging or opening a box to find a present. We love gifts.

The passage we're going to look at today is all about a gift. It's a gift that probably isn't on our wish list or our gift registry... but it's a gift that the Perfect Gift-Giver knows that we need: The gift of repentance.

Now that's not very exciting, is it? I'd rather have a concert ticket or a new set of golf clubs. But God knows us better than we know us, and He gives us gifts that He knows we need. Today's message from God's Word is that repentance is a gift.

So as we look at these verses this morning—this passage in 1 Corinthians 10 and those verses I read earlier from Luke 13—we're going to work through three important questions: 1) What happens if we *don't* repent? 2) What do we repent *of*? 3) *How* do we repent?

Let's pray before we begin.

**What happens if we *don't* repent?** To answer this first question we're going to look back at Luke 13. This parable that Jesus gives about a fig tree.

A man has had a fig tree in his vineyard for years. Now, a fig tree is a fruit tree and most fig trees produce a fruit called a fig. But this tree wasn't producing fruit. It would sprout leaves in the right season... it would look like it was doing what it was made to do... but this fruit tree did not produce its fruit.

For three years the owner would come out and hope to find some fruit on this fruit tree. On the third year—his third year of looking and finding nothing worthwhile on the branches—the owner was ready to give up. This fruit tree

wasn't doing the only thing it was put there to do. What good was a fig tree that didn't produce figs? The owner tells his gardener, "Cut it down. Why should it even use up the ground?" He was done waiting. He had been patient, but enough was enough. This tree was just wasting space. Fruitless trees get cut down.

But the gardener convinced him to give it one more year. He had something he wanted to try: he wanted to take special care of this tree, digging around it and fertilizing it to give it the best chance of success. "Give it one more year," the gardener said. "If it still doesn't produce fruit, then you can cut it down." Because fruitless trees get cut down.

Jesus gave this illustration to explain what he had said earlier. There were two stories going around that people were talking about, the note-worthy news of the day; two different times when seemingly-innocent people were tragically killed. People thought that they had died because of their sin. But Jesus bluntly responded, "No, but unless YOU repent YOU will die." He said two times: "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish... unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

Do you understand the parable? We are the fig tree, and repentance is our fruit. If we don't produce our fruit, we will die. It might even seem like we have leaves and sprouts and like we're doing the right thing, living the right way... But fruitless trees get cut down, and people who don't repent will perish.

What happens if we *don't* repent? We will perish.

We will perish like those Israelites we read about in 1 Corinthians. Remember them? They give us an example of what happens if we *don't* repent, but they also help us answer our second question this morning: **What do we repent of?**

Paul in 1 Corinthians is telling us about the Israelites after they were freed from the land of Egypt. He tells us four stories about them—four cautionary tales about the sin these people did, and what happened because of it.

He first talks about idolatry and quotes from the story in Exodus about the golden calf. Do you remember the story of the golden calf? After the Israelites made it safely across the Red Sea, God led them to Mount Sinai in order to give them the

Ten Commandments. Moses left them and went up to the top of the mountain to talk with God, but while he was away the Israelites thought it would be a good idea to take all the gold jewelry they had plundered from the Egyptians and cast it together into the fire so they could make a giant statue of a cow.

The Israelites danced around the calf, worshiped it, and offered sacrifices to it.

Just a few weeks—or days—earlier they had seen God open the waters of the Red Sea. They were miraculously freed from slavery in Egypt after 400 years and had been following a God-sent pillar of fire and smoke to guide them through the dangerous wilderness. But left to their own devices for just a few days and they start worshiping an idol.

Moses came down the mountain and saw the people dancing and celebrating around this Golden Calf and was infuriated. “His anger burned hot.” He threw down the Ten Commandments, had the calf burned with fire, ground into powder, and scattered into the drinking water. He made the people drink what was left of this “god” they had made for themselves, giving them a painful and visceral reminder that this *thing* they had made wasn’t god. The One, True God isn’t *made*. He IS.

What do we need to repent of? Idolatry is first on Paul’s list. How many false gods do *you* worship? How many things do you treat as more important than God? How many things do you invest more time in than your relationship with God? How many things do you quietly day-dream about while you should be listening to God’s Word and giving Him the respect and honor and worship he deserves?

If someone were to write down everything you did, everywhere you went, and everything you thought... what would *they* think was the most important thing in your life? Your job? What people think about you? Having enough money to be “financially secure” or comfortable?

The Israelites worshiped a golden calf as soon as Moses was out of earshot. What’s the golden calf in your life?

How many false gods do *you* worship? I bet it’s a long list. We need to repent of our idolatry. Fruitless trees get cut down, and people who don’t repent will perish.

Paul next talks about sexual immorality. He brings up the story in Numbers 25, —after the Israelites left Mount Sinai on their long journey to the Promised Land—when some Israelites committed adultery with Moabite women who lived nearby. The Israelites defiled their bodies and they defiled their worship, because they joined these women in pagan ceremonies and feasts and sacrifices to the gods of Moab. They even worshiped the false god Baal, the chief god of the Egyptian pantheon, the very false “god” that Yahweh had defeated just a few years before.

This was a serious sin against the True God who had redeemed and rescued them. *Every sin is a serious sin. Every sin is worthy of eternal punishment and a forever-separation from God.* Because of their sexual immorality God sent a plague to the Israelites and 23,000 of them died in a single day. Sin is serious, and sexual immorality is certainly a sin we need to repent of.

Maybe you’ve had an affair. Maybe you have a wandering eye that sees things you shouldn’t. Maybe you’ve spent too much time imagining life with a *different* spouse. Sexual immorality is everywhere we turn these days. A 30-second TV ad, a random magazine cover, a billboard on the highway. There are temptations *everywhere*, enticing us to sexual immorality, whether we’re married or not.

We need to repent of our immorality. Fruitless trees get cut down, and people who don’t repent will perish.

Feeling guilty yet? Paul has more. Verse 9: “We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents.” He’s talking about that time in Numbers 21 when the Israelites tested God and said “we loathe this worthless food.”

They were talking about manna and quail; the food that God had been miraculously providing for them for years as they journeyed through the desert wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. This “worthless food” was how God had been taking care of them and providing for them and meeting their needs, but the people put God to the test by criticizing Him and asking, “Has God brought us out of Egypt just so that we die here in the wilderness?”

It’s a sin to test the Lord. To question His goodness, to doubt His promises, and to challenge His power. Because of their sin, God sent “fiery serpents among the

people” and many were bitten and died.

Do we put the Lord to the test? Do we elevate ourselves *above* God so that we can doubt him? So we can arrogantly think that we know what’s best; that we know what needs to happen? We forget or choose to ignore God’s promises all the time. Everyday we wake up and sooner or later we decide that we know what to do and we have the tools and resources to get it done. We don’t need God.

We can think about God at church; how often do we think about God during the week? How often do we *ask God* what the best plan is? What the best thing to do might be? How often do we loop God into our internal monologues and ask for His wisdom and guidance?

Not often enough. We question His goodness all the time. We challenge His power and usurp His throne all the time. We need to repent for putting God to the test. Fruitless trees get cut down, and people who don’t repent will perish.

Finally, Paul mentions grumbling as a sin that we need to repent of. He’s quoting Exodus again, talking about when the Israelites grumbled against God and against Moses to complain that they were hungry and thirsty. They had just been rescued from Egypt but they said to themselves in Exodus 17, “Is the Lord among us or not?” And to Moses: “Did you bring us up out of Egypt just to kill us and our children and our livestock?”

God forgave their sin of grumbling and provided food from heaven and water from a rock. But grumbling was a common sin for the Israelites. They grumbled again and again, never trusting God to take care of them. Never trusting God to keep His promises.

Because of their repeated sin God told them that of all the people of Israel who had been rescued from Egypt—some think it could have been two million people—only two would be allowed to cross into the long-awaited Promised Land. Everyone else—even Moses—would die in the wilderness, never tasting the promised milk and honey. Paul says they were “destroyed by the Destroyer.”

Sin is serious. Grumbling might be as common a sin among us as sexual immorality, maybe even moreso. When was the last time you grumbled about not having your way? About not having enough? Enough food; a big enough house;

a supportive-enough family? Are you grumbling against God? Are you questioning His sovereignty; rebelling against His design for your life?

We need to repent of our grumbling. Fruitless trees get cut down, and people who don't repent will perish.

What do we need to repent of? The list is long, and we could add much, much more. We are sinners through and through, we are covered and riddled and stained with sin through and through.

But our passage today also answers our third question: **How do we repent?**

Verse 13: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

A "way of escape" from being cut down like that fruitless fig tree. From perishing like so many of those unrepentant Israelites in the wilderness. One of the "ways of escape" that God offers to us is the gift of repentance.

Christ was a flesh-and-blood person just like all of us this morning. He endured the same temptations we endure, but He endured them without sin. He was the perfect, sinless sacrifice that took our place on the cross of punishment and now He sits at the side of our Father God to constantly intercede for us. When we fail—and we fail often—He gives us the opportunity and the ability to confess our sins. The gift of repentance. And our God is a loving father who is **LONGING** for us to repent. **LONGING** for us to stop looking to other gods, to stop looking to other things to provide for us, to give us comfort, to give us satisfaction.

And when we repent, we are forgiven.

How do we repent? We run to the out-stretched arms of our loving Father. We run to Him, asking Him to not look at our sin but to look at Christ's perfection instead. We run to Him, knowing that He will hear us and He will forgive us. We run to Him, trusting His promises and falling into His loving arms.

We can repent of our sins in many different ways. We begin every worship service with a congregational confession of sin, and then a congregational

absolution, when I—or Pastor Wesley—speak the words of Jesus to you and tell you that your sins are forgiven. We can repent of our sins privately, we can confess our sins to a pastor and they can give us the words of Jesus privately.

But our passage today talks about even another kind of repentance. The Lord's Supper. Just like the Israelites in the wilderness, we have been given a spiritual food that provides for us, nourishes us, and keeps us alive. We eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus each week here at Gloria Dei to repent of our sins and receive the forgiveness that our Father offers.

Fruitless trees get cut down, and people who don't repent will perish. But God has given us the gift of repentance, and He promises to forgive anyone who runs to Him.

1 John 1:9 – “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Praise God. Amen.