

Healing Our Broken Humanity

Chapter 3: Repent Together

“Our world is plagued by the pursuit of power and control, and by injustices, exploitations, and racial disparities. These are political, social, and racial problems. But they are also personal and social sins.”

“As God’s people, we must embrace repentance and change. These are the right responses to racism, sexism, greed, and other forms of social and personal sin. But what is repentance?”

“Repentance involves key changes in people, groups, and communities. It includes our minds, hearts, and wills. Repentance can be personal, but it can also be corporate. Repentance includes *metanoia*, a change of mind and a turning around.”

“There are individual sins and corporate/community sins. As individuals we sin by ourselves and come to God for forgiveness. We are very aware of our individual sins, as we commit them personally. Corporate sins are committed by society and institutions that we as individuals become complicit in. We fail to speak up against institutional sins such as racism, sexism, and injustice in the criminal justice system. We therefore need to repent of our social sins as well. ‘Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord’ (Acts 3:19).”

The authors describe repentance as a four-stage process:

Conviction: “We recognize that that one or more of our attitudes and behaviors are wrong are wrong. They are broken and sinful, and they can damage us and others. This conviction of sin grips our hearts and minds.”

Contrition: “We lament, regret, and mourn our mistakes and sins. We feel sorrow and remorse for these attitudes and behaviors, for their effect on people and on the earth, and for their offensiveness to God. Contrition is a godly sorrow that moves us to action.”

Commitment: We decide to turn away from our sin and commit to new, God-honoring, and redemptive attitudes, postures, and behaviors. This is changing our minds, changing our attitudes, changing our purpose, changing our desires, and changing our ways.”

Change: “We practice a new way of being in the world. This is the way of repentance, righteousness, humility, justice, love, and reconciliation. Godly sorrow leads to faith, hope, and love.”

We need to repent because we, individually and corporately, so often desire and long for things we shouldn't that bring brokenness and pain to ourselves and those around us. "Sometimes this brokenness comes through no fault of our own. At other times it's a direct consequence of choices we've made, values we've embraced, and behaviors we've adopted...But the good news is that there's hope for a new and full life through the path of repentance and change."

The authors then turn their attention to the things we need to repent of, such as:

- Worshipping Modern Idols and Pursuing Power and Control
- Confusing Religious Patriotism with Christian Discipleship
- Believing American Exceptionalism
- Sanctioning Violence
- Chasing Money and Status
- Embracing Individualism
- Fostering Disunity and Division
- Cultivating Racism and Sexism
- Closing Our Hearts to Refugees and Migrants

The authors conclude with a final example, repenting of the things we and our society have done to marginalize others or that contributed to their marginalization. Jesus is not only concerned for the marginalized, he identifies with them. He welcomes, hears, and prioritizes the poor, the sinners, the women, the sick, and the outcast. His concern for those on the margins is scandalous and in sharp contrast to the spirit of his age and uncompassionate religiosity of other religious leaders.

Jesus calls us to welcome, embrace, and listen to those who are marginalized by society for a variety of reasons:

Those marginalized because of their physical life (including the disabled, the elderly, and the sick)

Those marginalized because of their race, ethnicity, or gender (including indigenous groups, people of color, and women)

Those marginalized because of their religion, profession, or sexual orientation (including Muslims, sex workers, and same-sex-attracted persons)

Those marginalized because of their political persuasions (including those who hold different political views from you)

"In this process of repentance, we join Jesus in compassion, welcome and friendship. Jesus welcomes to table fellowship those who are usually shunned. Jesus was crucified because of the people he ate with. Our repentance leads us to the same table fellowship."

Practices, Challenges, and Activities for Small Groups

Practice Conviction Together: Conviction involves recognizing that some of our attitudes and behaviors are wrong. 1) Pray as a group that God would fill our hearts with conviction; 2) Find ways to go into your neighborhoods and communities and be with marginalized people, as you get to know them, take note of the ways the Spirit is convicting you to repent; 3) List the things the Spirit is convicting you to repent of on paper and regularly pray and act on those things.

Practice Commitment Together: Commitment is about determining together to change our minds, attitudes, purpose, desires, and ways. 1) Ask members of your group to consider the list of the things you feel convicted to repent of and write down personal commitments to new behaviors and attitudes; 2) Share these commitments with each other; 3) Give each other feedback on these commitments; 4) Spend time praying together that God would help you keep these commitments; 5) Do this in a spirit of repentance, grace, forgiveness, love, faith, and hope.

Practice Change Together: Conviction and commitment must lead to change. Reconciliation and forgiveness demand a new way of living in the world. 1) Form small accountability groups; 2) Meet for regularly for accountability discussions; 3) Begin with prayer recognizing that change happens through the power of God; 4) Commit to confidentiality, empathy, listening, honesty, and accountability; 5) Discuss the list you have formed of things you feel convicted to repent of and the commitments you have made to change; 6) Hold each other accountable by asking hard and challenging questions about the commitments to change you've made.

Discussion Questions

Why is repentance important?

What do you need to repent of and how do you need to change?

What does your church and culture need to repent of?

What needs to change for you and your church to repent of white (or other) cultural captivity, of racial and gender injustice, and of your complicity?

What steps will you take to apply this practice fully and in the long term? Think about how you can apply this practice in your life, family, church and neighborhood.