

## **Victory over the devil<sup>1</sup>** The Five R's: "Repentance"

He is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!

I know last week was Easter, but this is the cry of all God's children that echoes throughout the ages: "Our Lord Lives!" And because of that, we have so many blessings that can be ours. Because of that, we also have an enemy who wants nothing more than to destroy us. Enter, then, our series for this period after Easter leading to Pentecost: "Victory over the devil – the five 'R's.'"

Why in the world would we have a series like this, especially following Easter? The answer is simply this: Easter proves Jesus won and the victory is ours! This, in turn, means the devil is angry! He's so upset, he wants nothing more than to destroy us, and if we're not careful, our Easter victory can turn into a Pentecostal defeat!

So for the next few weeks, we're taking a look at the situation we are in, and how we can respond to it. At the end of each week, it's my goal that we each walk out of church strengthened in our faith, and with fresh ideas and new tactics to employ the victory that is already ours through Jesus. Each week we'll look at another "R" word that leads us to realize and live in the victory Jesus won for us.

You see, our enemy, the devil, is crafty. God tells us in His word the devil can disguise himself as an angel of light (we're going to return to this in just a minute). What that means is he can make himself look good. One of his greatest tools is to convince Christians that he is not a threat. He minimizes sin and its effect until even believers are so tangled in it that they find themselves in spiritual bondage.

When Christians sin and do not properly deal with that sin, they develop patterns in their lives that are displeasing to God. These patterns are called spiritual bondage, or spiritual strongholds. This is defined as "a mindset impregnated with hopelessness that causes one to accept as unchangeable something known to be contrary to the will of God."

Today we are turning to the book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, chapter 7, verses 8 through 10. 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians is the 8<sup>th</sup> book in the New Testament, so the order goes, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – the Gospels that tell about the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus; then comes the book of Acts that records the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the early church; after Acts come the "Epistles", literally "letters" that answer the question, "In light of what Jesus taught

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Steps to Freedom in Christ*, Marty Hughes

and what we now know by the power of the Holy Spirit, how are we supposed to live?" The Epistles start with the book of Romans, then comes 1<sup>st</sup>, and then 2<sup>nd</sup>, Corinthians.

We've talked about the city of Corinth before, and mentioned how it was a little like the Las Vegas of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. The Holy Spirit sent the first letter to the Corinthian church to help them deal with the influences of the world they had allowed in the church. 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians is a follow-up letter to the first that addresses some of the concerns the people there had about Paul and his visit to them, and then offers a stern rebuke for those who were actively trying to undermine the Holy Spirit and the teaching He gave them through the Apostle Paul.

Again, we are going to 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 7, verses 8 through 10. Remember, the first letter to the Corinthians dealt with the sin they had let into their lives, and it was very straightforward and to the point. Here's what the Holy Spirit says through Paul now in this follow-up letter: *"Even if I caused you sorrow by my {first} letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it – I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while – yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*

Enter then the first "R" word of our series: repentance. We don't always like hearing about the need to repent, do we? We don't like being told we are wrong, that we are in opposition to the Word, will and working of God. I think that's because we get this last verse mixed up. In your Bibles, I invite you to underline a few key words in verse 10: *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.* That's actually what we want to talk about today to start this series.

We need to repent. Repent of those things that are in opposition to God that He has very clearly spelled out in His word. Repent out of Godly sorrow so that our sins will not stand in the way of our salvation, and we will not be left with regrets.

Why start here with this series? Because if the devil can keep us from repenting, or can keep us arguing against the things of God, then he keeps us from the victory we have over him. You can't have victory over anything, if you're still hanging on to the very thing you're trying to get victory over! That would be a little like the alcoholic saying they really want to be free of the hold alcohol has over them, while they are taking drinks from the bottle while saying it!

So what is repentance? You can write this definition in your Bibles: Repentance means that we turn away from our sin, and turn to God. The word repentance is from the Greek word *metanoia*, and it literally means "a change of mind which results in a change of lifestyle."<sup>2</sup> This involves agreeing with God that our sins are abominable. The good news is what we say every

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<sup>2</sup> Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Greek (New Testament): 3567 μετάνοια

Sunday morning, and you can make a note of this in your Bibles next to these verses in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians: 1<sup>st</sup> John 1:9 *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

Confession is simply saying, “Here are my sins, God. Here are the things I know I’ve done and not done, and I ask you to forgive me for them. I even ask you to bring to light those sins I don’t recognize and help me to confess and repent of them too.” We don’t confess our sins to God because He doesn’t know what they are, we confess our sins because we need to be honest with ourselves over what we are doing, thinking, or saying that is against God. More to the point of this series, we confess our sins because once something is named, it is exposed. And once something is exposed, it cannot have the same power over us it once did. Once that power is broken, the devil has lost his hold on us. Repentance following confession, that is, the literal turning away from the sin we named, keeps the devil from being able to worm his way back into our lives.

Here is the key to understanding the devil and his plan for your life. And yes, make no mistake about that: God has a plan for our lives and it involves our eternal life in Heaven with Him through the faith given to us by the Holy Spirit who He has given to those who believe in Jesus as their only Lord and Savior. The enemy of our souls has a plan for us, too: to not believe the Word of God, and suffer with him (that is, the devil) for eternity. It’s important to understand the key strategy the devil uses to accomplish this.

He’s not going to come at most of us with scary images, dark occultic practices, and witchcraft or wiccan teachings and practices (though he *will* use those). His main strategy is to get us to think that our sins will not hurt us, or even get us to the point where we start denying what is and is not sin, finding loop-holes and ways around the truth. He’ll do it by getting us to rationalize with ourselves, leading us to think *we* have the answers we need. He’ll even use people to tell us what we want to hear, and some of those people will even think they are serving God! You can make another note in the margins of your Bibles. Just a few chapters later, the Holy Spirit says in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11:13-14 *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.*

The devil can make himself look good, and make himself sound so logical. The key for us is to know what God’s word says, and we can never fully appreciate what God’s word says when our own sin remains in the way, in an unrepentant state. Confession and repentance opens our eyes to see the truth – even if it’s not something we necessarily want to see.

Now, here’s the good news, and the point on which we are going to end this message this morning. Repentance is the key to beginning our victory over the hold the devil would have on us, and the really good news is that it’s not something we can do on our own! Yeah – that’s the good news – we can’t do this on our own!

God's love for you is so deep, that not only is He ready to forgive and forget sin, He's going to provide us with His own Holy Spirit to help us confess and repent – to help us acknowledge our own sin and turn away from it to lead a different life. I think sometimes this is probably the biggest thing the Christian church misses and simply gets wrong: it is not up to us to 'do better', to try harder, to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, to somehow make ourselves right with God – we can't! That's what Good Friday and Easter Sunday was all about! Thank God, literally, for Grace!

Because we can't do it on our own, Jesus did it for us. All we "have to do" (so to speak), is simply receive the gift that is given – the being made right with God, literally, receiving the righteousness of Christ He wants us to have. The thing we need to get out of the way so we can receive the gift is the sin that wants to cling to us – and if we're honest with ourselves, the sin we want to cling to because it feels good, because it's comfortable, because it's a 'known', because to turn away from it means that we are not in charge and able to determine right and wrong on our own, but God is. This is what the devil would use to keep us in spiritual bondage, to keep us in the mindset impregnated with hopelessness that causes one to accept as unchangeable something known to be contrary to the will of God.

I'm not saying we can be sinless. We can't. There was only one sinless person who ever lived, and that was Jesus. I'm saying true confession and repentance – naming the sin, asking to be forgiven and being changed to turn away from sin – loosens the hold the devil has on us, and gives us the ability to live in the victory Jesus has won for us.

So, here's the question this morning, here's the thought we walk out of this Holy House with today: What is the sin that clings to us, that we *need* to repent of? What is it that is keeping us from living fully in the victory Jesus gives us? What are those spiritual strongholds that need to come crumbling down so we can be free from them?

As one last illustration: in the Old Testament book of Judges, the Israelites came up against a stronghold called Jericho's wall. It was a wall about 15 feet thick that surrounded the gift God wanted the Israelites to have – the defeat of the city of Jericho. They could have said "It's too hard. We'll never be able to get the wall down and defeat the enemy that put it up." They could have, but they didn't. Instead they did what must have seemed ridiculous at the time: first they repented, following the steps they needed to in order to make themselves 'clean.' Then they literally marched in circles around the wall until, at the time appointed by God, they raised their voices in a victory yell, and God tore the walls down flat so they could go in to the city and claim the gift God had given them.

They didn't care how it looked to be marching around the city. They didn't care about the jeer's that probably came at them from the people of the city of Jericho. They only knew something better awaited them, and they trusted God enough to do what He said: to confess, to repent, and then to take what God was giving them.

Will we do the same? We will not care what others think of our confession and repentance?  
Will we simply, every man, woman, boy and girl, fall on our knees in *Godly sorrow that brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret*, and receive the forgiveness and new life – the victory – God offers through Jesus?

It's free, it's eternal, and it's ours because God said so! Let's all hold on to that this week as we each repent, seek God's face, and begin to reclaim what the evil one has been trying to take away.

He has risen! He has risen indeed! And the victory is ours because of Him.

Amen.