

Philippians 1:9-11 An Advent Prayer of true repentance.

Advent 2 December 6,7, 2009 (Children – No devotion due to communion)

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ Amen

God's Word is written in Philippians 1:9-11

These are Your Words heavenly Father. May they prepare us with true repentance in Christ! Your Word is truth!

Amen.

Dear Friends, in Christ,

Last week the sermon was about being prepared to meet the Lord. I mentioned that one of the things God calls for is repentance. The Bible uses the word repentance in three ways. First, it describes when we are genuinely sad over sins because we realize that sin separates us from God. The thought of our sins should strike terror in our conscience for we know that each sin we commit is a horrible offense against God. We have earned His anger. We deserve to die right now and then to suffer eternal punishment in hell. This sense of repentance is needed but if this is the only repentance we have is becomes "sorrow that brings death." (2 Cor. 7:10) Judas had this kind of repentance after betraying Jesus. The Bible gives no indication that he returned to the Lord for forgiveness before he died. If he did not, he is in hell.

The second description of repentance is of a sorrow for sin which includes faith in Christ. Faith is worked in our hearts as we hear the Good News that Christ has forgiven every sin by giving His perfect life as a sacrifice on the cross. We look to God alone to provide the only solution for our sins. The world cannot provide lasting happiness, peace, or comfort in troubling times. A repentant sinner realizes that only Christ can offer lasting help as our Savior.

The third biblical description of repentance is a new life in Christ. The word "repent" means to have a change in thinking or a change of heart. God replaces our sinful thoughts and actions with His way of thinking and doing. This is called producing "fruits in keeping with repentance" or living by faith in Christ. This third type of repentance is what the Apostle Paul is describing in our verses for today. His words are

An Advent prayer of true repentance!

First, true repentance turns away from a sinful way of life. We know that we cannot ever be totally free of sin as long as we live, but that doesn't mean that we should embrace sin or be satisfied to live in it. Paul wrote, "*This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight*" (v.9). If these words were our prayer, why would we need to ask for love to abound? God intends that we first deeply receive the love the Christ, like a tree whose roots go deeply into the soil. Yet, our sinful nature is fighting to keep us from the love of God.

Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13: "*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.... It is not self-seeking; it is not easily angered.... Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.*" (1 Corinthians 13:4-6) But our old nature says, "I'm not going to be patient. What will it get me?" It tells us, "If I'm kind, everyone will walk all over me. And unless I go after what I want for myself, I'll never get anywhere in this world." Too often the Holy Spirit gives us strength, ability, and blessings, through in Christ, but we don't use them. Jesus told His disciples, "*If you have faith the size of a mustard seed... nothing will be impossible for you.*" (Matthew 17:20) Yet, how often do we call on God even to do the smallest things? So much could be done in our church, homes, workplaces, and in the schools of our land if we would only call on the Lord in true repentance and faith in His love!

Our new and old natures constantly fight within us. We need God's Word to win over our thinking. It will convict us of our sins and help us more highly value Christ's forgiveness. Think of the prodigal son. He knew that he deserved nothing from his father. Yet, when he returned, his father accepted him and gave him a place to live. He must have been grateful for the rest of his life. How much more we sinners do not deserved a place with God. Yet, He

sent His Jesus to suffer and die in our place and give us everything good. We must be thankful for such undeserved kindness!

Second, true repentance seeks discernment. Paul prayed that their love would grow based on the grace of God. Why? *“So that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.”* (v.10) Discernment means to have a practical godly wisdom. The word was used when describing how a metal coin was tested to see if it was genuine. Through God’s Word we will put into practice how to “choose between good and evil, true and false, valuable and worthless, between what pleases God or displeases Him, and between what serves the Kingdom of God and what opposes it.” (Kretzmann Commentary)

The world is constantly trying to replace what is good from God with something inferior. For instance, we know that taking an innocent human life is wrong, but some people say that certain human life like an unborn child or the elderly person doesn’t have value. They say it is better to end their lives than let them live. We know from God’s Word that every human life is precious to God no matter what age. We need to make sure we are thinking along God’s line and not by some humanistic approach to life.

It is important that we know what’s right so that we can help others learn the truth. There are so many people who are confused with life. Their conscience is hurting, but they don’t know why. The last thing unbelievers need is for us to set a bad example by what we say or do. We should be blameless in our dealings with all people. Paul wrote about the Day of Christ’s return. It is important that we hold to the faith and live by God’s Word so others can learn the saving truth before it’s too late. Paul stated this concern in Romans 13, *“The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness.... Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”* (Romans 13:12, 14)

Things that oppose God and His kingdom are to be pushed aside. We are to consider our sins to be like filthy clothes. We have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus so that we are pure in God’s sight. Why return to a filthy way of life when God offers us so much more? We’ve been found by Christ and are His forever. Then, why do we sometimes act as if we are still lost? Why do we act as if the world is setting the standard for our life instead of God’s Word? Let’s daily return to the Word! Martin Luther quoted Romans 6 in his explanation of Baptism: *“We were buried with [Christ] through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”* (Romans 6:4) (Small Catechism)

Third, our strength for a new life is in Christ. Paul prayed that our lives would be *“filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God.”* (v.11). We are forgiven through Christ alone and we have power to become new people in Him through faith. Paul wrote, *“We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”* (Ephesians 2:10-11) Every day we should be growing in the knowledge of who we are in Christ, despite our sinfulness. Jesus compared unbelievers to trees bearing bad fruit, and believers to trees bearing good fruit. He said, *“A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.”* (Matthew 7:18) We are to be full of good fruit, like love, joy, peace, and patience, so that there is no room for bad fruit in our lives. We are to be thinking, doing, and saying all that pleases God, and leave no room in us for sin. This is all part of living in repentance.

We will not be perfect here. Yet, God tells us to avoid sin so we don’t get snared by it but that we keep looking for opportunities of honor Him. At the end of each day we will ask God to forgive us for Jesus’ sake. We will need to pray that the Holy Spirit will guide and strengthen us for a new day. The Bible promises, *“[God] will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (1 Corinthians 1:8) Keep praying this Advent season that God would help us all to better understand His will and to follow His truth in

repentance. Amen.