

## 10. Repentance and Forgiveness (2Q 2026 Growing in a Relationship with God)

**Biblical material:** Isa. 61:10; Hosea 6; Acts 3:18, 19; Exod. 34:1–10; Rom. 6:23; Matt. 22:1–14; 1 John 1:9.

### Quotes

- God is not looking for repayment, but repentance. What heals a broken relationship is sincere love and contrition. *Frederica Mathewes-Green*
- Nothing erases the past. There is repentance, there is atonement, and there is forgiveness. That is all, but that is enough. *Ted Chiang*
- Forgiveness breaks the irreversibility of the past. It is the undoing of what has been done. Repentance and forgiveness – the two great gifts of human freedom – redeem the human condition from tragedy. *The Koren Sacks Yom Kippur Machzor*
- True repentance involves a change of heart and not just a change of behavior. *Ezra Taft Benson*
- There are still people who insist that we have to preach on repentance. Well, I disagree! I think we should do it God’s way – preach the goodness of God and allow the goodness of God to lead people to repentance. *Joseph Prince*
- When I was a kid I used to pray every night for a new bicycle. Then I realized that the Lord doesn’t work that way so I stole one and asked Him to forgive me. *Emo Philips*

### Questions

What problem is there in stressing the idea that we are simply covered by a robe that takes care of our sins? Why do most belief systems emphasize the need for forgiveness rather than spiritual change? Why do so many preachers use fear instead of emphasizing that God’s kindness should lead us to repentance? What does this say about God’s character?

### Bible summary

Isaiah 61:10 speaks of the prophet being “dressed with the clothing of salvation.” Hosea 6 is a call to return to the Lord for healing. “Repent, and change your ways, that your sins can be wiped away, so the Lord can send opportunities for you to heal and recover” (Acts 3:19). Exodus 34:1–10 is God’s self-description when Moses received the second set of the Ten Commandments. “The wage sin pays is death, but God’s free gift is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Matthew 22:1–14 is Jesus’ parable about the wedding banquet. “if we confess our sins, he is trustworthy and right so that he can forgive us our sins and make us clean from all that is not right in us” (1 John 1:9).

### Comment

If we follow the Pharisees and their law-keeping system, we only see sin as rule-breaking. It is far more than that—it is the destruction of a relationship with God and a rejection of the fundamental principles of truth and right. As we come back into that right relationship with God, then sin is not preoccupation with rules but seeing sin as abhorrent, understanding that we would not even *think* of doing wrong.

For sin is not simply disobedience to a set of instructions, but rather that God was disbelieved, distrusted, and disowned. Consequently only as absolute trust in our trustworthy God is restored can the harmony of God’s Universe be re-established. For it’s the kindness (or alternatively translated, “goodness”) of God that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4)—not fear of punishment for the breaking of laws. If we still fear, then we do not truly love:

“Where there is love there can be no fear. God loves us completely, and this love drives all our fears away. If we do fear, it’s because we fear being punished, and this shows that we have not been fully remade by the completeness of God’s love. (1 John 4:18).

The right relationship is dependent on knowing God as he truly is, and in agreeing with God that his way is completely right—that is why we call God good! Only as we each enter into that loving relationship to a truly good God, who wants to heal and save; only then can the damage of sin be repaired and the charges of the Devil refuted.

So when it comes to repentance and forgiveness, it's not about being pronounced "not guilty." It's a recognition of the need for change and healing,

Restoration. Cure. Healing. God remaking his image in us. That's what God wants to do, not to have us come to him and say, "Please forgive me" and once we are forgiven go on in our own way. God is far more interested in taking away our desire to sin than in just taking away specific sins!

That's why when Peter asked Jesus about forgiveness he missed the point. The Jews said forgive five times. Peter in saying seven times thought he was being extra generous. But Jesus' "seventy times seven" expresses the kind of *attitude* that real forgiveness is all about. And that's why we must not limit God's forgiveness.

So what does that mean for the way we live, and how we treat one another? We need to remember that "We do not receive forgiveness *because* but *as* we forgive. The ground of all forgiveness is that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Ellen White, *Signs of the Times*, 14 April 1895. As a result we should "Be kind and compassionate to each other, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you." Ephesians 4:32.

God's desire for all of us is to be right with one another and one with him. In order to do that we have to come to the only one who can help us. And forgiveness in this case is not enough. When we are sick and go to the doctor, he doesn't say "I forgive you." He attempts to provide a cure. In just the same way, when we are spiritually sick, God doesn't say "I forgive you." Rather he enters in and begins the process of change and healing, making us well again.

Because even if we should refuse his help, and eventually die, just like a doctor who goes to the funeral of a patient who refused his help, God may still be saying "I forgive you"—but we will be dead. Forgiveness can never be enough, it must lead us to that oneness with God that is eternal life.

For it is God who deals with our guilt, who forgives us all our wrongdoing, and heals us from the disease of sin. More than legal declarations of forgiveness, God restores the broken relationship and re-makes us in his image once more.

### **Ellen White Comments**

Jesus knows the circumstances of every soul. You may say, I am sinful, very sinful. You may be; but the worse you are, the more you need Jesus. He turns no weeping, contrite one away.... He bids every trembling soul take courage. Freely will He pardon all who come to Him for forgiveness and restoration..." {AG 118}

The moment we ask for forgiveness in contrition and sincerity, God forgives. {ST, 4 September 1893}

Christ draws the sinner by the exhibition of his love upon the cross, and this softens the heart, impresses the mind, and inspires contrition and repentance in the soul. {RH, 1 April, 1890}.

The Jewish precepts enjoined upon men the duty of forgiving five offenses, and Peter thought that in suggesting seven times he had reached the limit of human patience. But Jesus would have him understand that those who have the divine mind, and were imbued with the divine spirit, would exercise forgiveness without limit. The plan and ground of salvation, which is love, is the principle which must be carried out by [the] human family. Should Christ limit His mercy, compassion, and forgiveness by a certain number of sins, how few men would be saved! {UL 43}

He [Jesus] presented to men that which was exactly contrary to the representations of the enemy in regard to the character of God, and sought to impress upon men the paternal love of the Father, who "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." [John 3:16.] He urged upon men the necessity of prayer, repentance, confession, and the abandonment of sin. {CE 74}

