

RENDING THE HEART

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“Now, therefore,” says the Lord, “Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning,” So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm” (Joel 2:12-13).

This passage written by the prophet Joel is God’s call for His unfaithful people to repent. Their repentance was not to be delayed, but to be done “now.” They were to “turn” to God because repentance involves a turning away from sin to God (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:9). They had this opportunity to repent because God was longsuffering and merciful toward them, as He is with man today (2 Peter 3:9). God does not want the wicked to perish (Ezekiel 18:32). Repentance of sin is the necessary action the sinner must take in returning to a holy God.

Repentance is described in this passage as “rending the heart.” The prophet of God advised the people to “rend your heart, and not your garments.” Tearing the clothes was an outward way of showing inward distress and grief. When Jacob thought that his son Joseph had been killed, he “tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days” (Genesis 37:34; see also v. 29; 44:13; Joshua 7:6; 2 Samuel 3:31; Esther 4:1; Job 1:20).

The problem with an outward show of grief is that it can be insincere, that is, not matched by an inward feeling of grief. A person could put on a show of “rending his garments” but not be truly sorry for his sins. God is not interested in a big outward show of grief if it is not accompanied by a penitent heart. This is hypocrisy.

A penitent heart that is broken with grief over sin is the heart that will receive the gracious forgiveness of God. David wrote, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart – these, O God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51:17). Jesus taught, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). God looks into the heart to see if there is a “godly sorrow that produces repentance to salvation” (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Is there sin in your life? Are you willing to “rend your heart” and repent of that sin? God’s forgiveness is available if you will come to Him.