

Let us bear fruit worthy of repentance

By Vladimir Shelkov

The Saint Scripture says, “If we claim to be without a sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us ” (1 John 1:8-9).

“Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins” (Ecclesiastes 7:20), and therefore each person needs to repent for the forgiveness of their sins.

But under what conditions may the Lord forgive us our sins? This question touches the very essence of our spiritual life, and very much depends on the correct solution.

Going around the country of Jordan, John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He urged all people to bear “fruit worthy of repentance” (Luke 3:3.8).

Repentance may be different. A person can repent only to appear that he repents, and also from the heart, from the depths of my soul. Fruit worthy of repentance is appropriate and meets the requirements of the fruit of divine truth. And it is not only recognized in the sincerity of their sins, but also in deeds, following this recognition.

Very clear conditions of forgiveness from the God were set up to the people of Israel in the days of Moses. “The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “If anyone sins and commits a breach of faith against the Lord by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security, or through robbery, or if he has oppressed his neighbor or has found something lost and lied about it, swearing falsely—in any of all the things that people do and sin thereby— if he has sinned and has realized his guilt and will restore what he took by robbery or what he got by oppression or the deposit that was committed to him or the lost thing that he found or anything about which he has sworn falsely, he shall restore it in full and shall add a fifth to it, and give it to him to whom it belongs on the day he realizes his guilt.

And he shall bring to the priest as his compensation to the Lord a ram without blemish out of the flock, or its equivalent for a guilt offering. And the priest shall make atonement for him before the Lord, and he shall be forgiven for any of the things that one may do and thereby become guilty” (Leviticus 6:1-7).

In Numbers 5:5-7 we see the same, only it’s about the sins in general. “And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the people of Israel, when a man or woman commits any of the sins that people commit by breaking faith with the Lord, and that person realizes his guilt, he shall confess his sin that he has committed. And he shall make full restitution for his wrong, adding a fifth to it and giving it to him to whom he did the wrong’.”

From this we see that it was not enough to bring only one trespass offering, it wasn’t enough just to recognize own guilt, whereas the penitent had to pay in full what he is to be blamed. And not only pay in full, but also give more than the damage was worth. This is a requirement of justice, and this proved the sincerity of treatment. And only after that the Lord may forgive the perpetrator.

A perpetrator not always had to give only the additional fifth part of his return. In Exodus 22:1.4 is written, “If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep...If the stolen beast is found alive in his possession, whether it is an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double.”

As you can see, the amount added to the return depended on the size of the crime. The bigger it was, the greater part has been appended. The most important lesson that we learn from this is that in each case, the consciousness of his/her guilt had to be proven by filling the damage that had inflicted harm, and not only to fill, but also giving him more than the damage.

But maybe, the similar penance was required only during the days of Moses?

No, the same requirement of fruit of repentance we can see in the days of David. When the prophet's Nathan told a story about a rich man, who has taken away a lamb from a poor, said David, exclaimed, "He (the rich) must repay four lambs to the poor man for the one he stole and for having no pity" (2 Samuel 12:6).

The same fruits of repentance we see in the days of Christ. Zacchaeus who started to believe in Christ said unto the Lord "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Luke 19:8).

The first apostles of the Christian Church called to the same repentance, repentance associated with worthy fruits. Apostle Peter referring to the Jews, said, "Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). Apostle Peter "declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance" (Acts 26:20).

The word "convert" means to rotate to the opposite direction. To turn means instead of a bad do good, instead of a sin, evil do moral, good, "do what is right and good" (Ezekiel 33:14). "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need" (Ephesians 4:28).

From all this we see that the conditions for forgiveness from the Lord is always the same. In addition to his consciousness of guilt, every sinner has do good for offended person, and make it even in a greater extent than the inflicted harm.

So, true repentance consists of two stages:

- 1) an admission of guilt and;
- 2) conversion, i.e. doing good deeds rather than evil ones.

The Persecutor Saul came to believe in Christ, devoted his life to the Lord, striving to do as much good instead of evil that was committed by him before coming to faith.

Such are the fruits of true repentance.

Dear brothers and sisters! And what are the fruits we are showing in our repentance? Do we recognize our guilt before our fellows and God for our mistakes and sins? If we recognize it, then what deeds prove the sincerity of our repentance? If we borrowed money from our friend, have we returned him/her back? By being dishonest with anyone in the calculation of the done work, have we changed our misbehavior? If we did not care of the elderly and sick parents, then realizing our guilt, did we provided them money, did we create a comfort to them, whether we surrounded them with the care and attention?

The material damage caused by us to anyone, must be compensated fully, because the Lord said that the wicked will forgiven only when he recognises it and "gives back what he has taken by robbery" (Ezekiel 33:15).

Spirit of Prophecy says: "If we have injured others through any unjust business transaction, if we have overreached in trade, or defrauded any man, even though it be within the pale of the law, we should confess our wrong, and make restitution as far as lies in our power. It is right for us to restore not only that which we have taken, but all that it would have accumulated if put to a right and wise use during the time it has been in our possession" (The Desire of Ages, Chapter 61).

Some could say: "We have nothing abducted and not taken away from our neighbor, did not hurt our fellow, and so we are clean. "

It is possible that these people have not done any material damage for the fellows. But there is another type of damage that is more severe and serious, which is being done by some fellow believers to their friends a moral damage. We can unjustly denigrate, slander our fellows and spread negative rumors about others.

We can sin before the neighbors, telling about them to others, what we know, about their weaknesses, negatives sides of the character, and sins, regardless of the order established by Christ (Matthew 18:15-17).

We can cause the wounds of the heart and the pain, tears, sorrow and due to our rudeness, callousness, avarice and egotism, sharp, incisive words, and many other things.

After a consciousness of our guilt, we can come to the offended and say to him: "Forgive me." We can even hug and kiss him. But if we finish our "repentance" here (as often happens in the lives of many), then a such confession would be partial, incomplete; repentance without transformation, without a fruit.

But the fruit of repentance are our good deeds, which we need to do for people after doing the evil ones, our good words for those who we had unjustly blackened. Our tenderness, compassion and empathy for those who we have offended, and we have to drain the tears caused by us, to heal the wounds with the balm of love. We must allow people to feel the warmth of our reversed hearts after our callousness and brutality. And all this good should be committed to a greater extent than the bad, committed until the repentance.

Only after the repentance is seen in fruits, we can hope that God will forgive us, and not just due to our actions, but due to His great love and mercy. Oh, if we have learned it as an immutable rule of our lives! How much less evil would have been in the community and in this world!

Of course, bad things for our fellows could be done a long time ago, and we, for some reasons, can not put it right and do good things. But what

can we do. We must, if we wish to be Christians, not only to be called Christians by name and in reality as well.

Quite often people are inclined to hide their mistakes and crimes. And sometimes they manage to hide their crimes from the people. But what is possible to hide from people, it is impossible to hide from God, because "The Lord is watching everywhere, keeping his eye on both the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3). "For he knows the secrets of every heart." (Psalm 44:22). Therefore "people who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). We will not let to drift toward evil words for regretting evil deeds (Psalms 141:4).

Let us not lose hope for the Lord's forgiving love in repentance. "He (Satan) will lead us to think that our mistakes and transgressions have been so grievous that the Lord will not have respect unto our prayers and will not bless and save us. In ourselves we can see nothing but weakness, nothing to recommend us to God, and Satan tells us that it is of no use; we cannot remedy our defects of character. When we try to come to God, the enemy will whisper, It is of no use for you to pray; did not you do that evil thing? Have you not sinned against God and violated your own conscience? But we may tell the enemy that "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). When we feel that we have sinned and cannot pray, it is then the time to pray. Ashamed we may be and deeply humbled, but we must pray and believe. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15) ("Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing", "The Lord's Prayer").

Let us fall down to the Christ's knees, we shall get freedom near His cross from the severity of our sins and crimes, and showing fruit worthy of repentance, we will continue our journey joyfully and freely with the God's blessings.