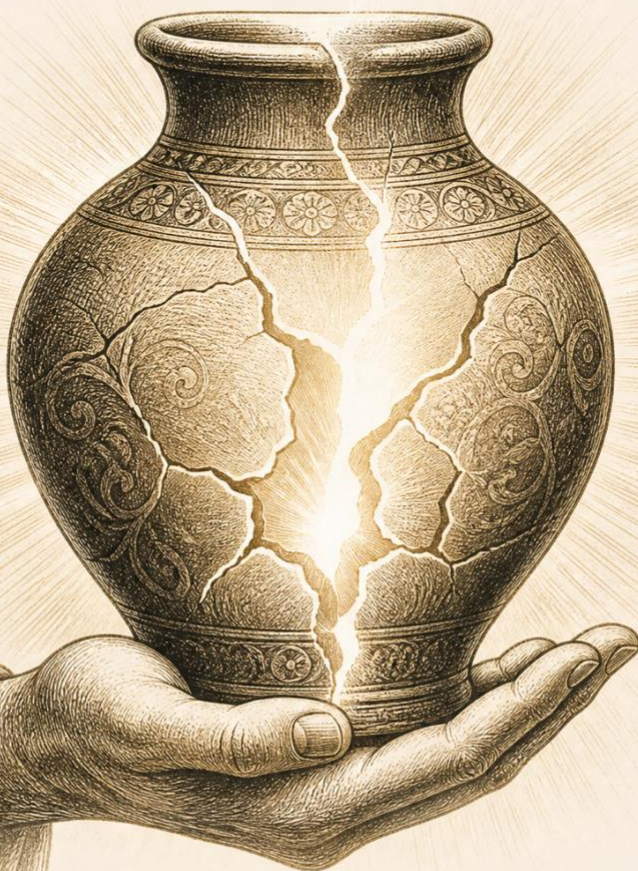

BROKENNESS GOD PARDONS

*A Theological Study of Repentance,
Regeneration, and Reformation*



Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar

Pastor Emeritus, Th.B., A.B., D.D.

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Theological Monograph

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DEDICATION

*“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise.”*

— Psalm 51:17

*To the fellowship of Holistic Enhancement for Lay-leaders and Pastors (HELP,
Inc.),*

brothers and sisters who have sought the Lord with broken and contrite hearts.

And to Estrella, Ellaazar, and Zarelle Grace, my beloved family in grace.

Soli Deo gloria.

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Preface

The ministry of the local church and its parachurch extensions exists for one central purpose: to bring human beings into living encounter with the living God. Yet the greatest obstacle to this encounter is not ignorance, nor intellectual doubt, nor even moral failure in itself. It is the hardness of the unbroken heart. A heart that has not been broken before God is a heart that has not yet truly seen God.

This present work arose from lectures delivered to the fellowship of Holistic Enhancement for Lay-leaders and Pastors (HELP, Inc.), a community of believers committed to the whole counsel of God and the full formation of God's people. In session after session, the theological theme that pressed itself upon me with renewed urgency was this: that the brokenness God accepts, the brokenness God pardons, is not the brokenness of external calamity or private regret. It is, rather, the brokenness of the spirit that Scripture calls repentance, regeneration, and reformation.

These are not three parallel options. They are three dimensions of one divine work: the work of bringing sinful human beings into genuine fellowship with the holy God. Repentance is the turning of the will. Regeneration is the renewal of the nature. Reformation is the correction of the doctrine and the life. Together, they describe what it means to come to God broken, and to leave His presence pardoned, renewed, and restored.

This small volume offers no novelty. I make no claim to originality in theology. What is offered here is the faithful exposition of truths that have shaped the Reformed and evangelical tradition for five centuries, truths rooted in the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament, confirmed in the apostolic writings of the New, and sealed in the blood of the Son of God. They are truths that the Church of every age must rediscover for herself, in every generation.

May these pages serve the formation of God's people. May the reading of them lead not to an argument in the mind, but to a breaking of the heart, and through that breaking, to the pardon, peace, and praise that God alone can give.

Soli Deo gloria.

Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar

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Introduction

There is no gospel word more arresting than the word of Isaiah the prophet, written seven centuries before the coming of Christ and yet as urgent as a summons delivered this morning: “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:6–7).

This text stands at the threshold of one of the great invitations of the Old Testament, an invitation not merely to religious observance, but to the encounter of the whole person with the living God. Embedded within this invitation is a set of prerequisites that are easy to overlook in the beauty of the promise that follows. The LORD calls the wicked to forsake their way. He calls the unrighteous to forsake their thoughts. He calls the wayward to return. These are not gentle suggestions. They are the conditions of the encounter. And they require, at their root, a posture that the whole of Scripture calls brokenness.

To be broken before God is not to be destroyed. It is, rather, to be remade. The Psalmist understood this when he wrote: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Ps. 51:17). The brokenness that God accepts is not the brokenness of despair or self-destruction. It is the brokenness of the soul that has seen something of the holiness of God and, in that light, has seen something true about itself: its moral poverty, its spiritual need, its absolute dependence on divine mercy.

This is the theological vision that animates every page of the present work. Brokenness, the brokenness God pardons, operates in three interconnected registers. The first is repentance: the turning of the will from sin toward God, the agreeing with God about our condition, the forsaking of the old way. The second is regeneration: the renewal of the whole person by the power of the Holy Spirit, the creation of new desires

and a new nature, the transformation of what we love and what we pursue. The third is reformation: the correction of wrong doctrine and wrong conduct in the light of the whole counsel of Scripture, both personal and corporate, both inward and outward.

Each of these three dimensions of brokenness is treated in a dedicated chapter. Chapter One examines the nature of repentance: what it is, what it produces, and how it is distinguished from the remorse that merely regrets consequences without genuinely turning to God. Chapter Two treats regeneration as the divine ground of the transformed life, with particular attention to the apostolic teaching of Romans 12:1–2. Chapter Three addresses the work of doctrinal and practical reformation, the ongoing discipline of bringing both belief and behaviour into conformity with the Word of God.

My conviction throughout is simple: the Church of Jesus Christ in every age needs men and women who are broken before God. They are broken in repentance, broken into new life by the Spirit's regenerating work, and broken from the patterns of wrong doctrine and wrong conduct that so easily entangle the community of faith. The world does not need a comfortable Church. It needs a broken one: broken and therefore pardoned, broken and therefore renewed, broken and therefore sent.

Let the reader approach these pages not as a spectator of theological argument, but as a participant in the divine invitation of Isaiah 55. Seek the LORD while He may be found. Return to Him. And receive the abundant pardon He has promised.

CHAPTER 1

Spiritual Brokenness through Repentance

“let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

— Isaiah 55:7

The word that the prophet Isaiah employs at the heart of his great invitation is not a word of comfort in the first instance. It is a word of demand. Before there can be return to the LORD, there must be a forsaking of the old direction. Before there can be pardon, there must be turning. This turning, this decisive movement of the whole person away from sin and toward God, is what the New Testament calls repentance, and what the theological tradition has recognized as the foundational act of the Christian life.

The Greek word rendered “confession” in 1 John 1:9 is *homologēō*, literally, “to say the same thing.” True repentance is not the manufacture of certain feelings, nor the performance of prescribed rituals. It is the moment when the human soul says the same thing about sin that God has always said about it. It agrees with the divine verdict. It does not minimize, excuse, or reframe the transgression. It names it as God names it, and it turns from it as God calls us to turn. This is the brokenness of repentance: the breaking of the self-deceiving heart that had said, “I have not sinned,” and the humble acceptance of the truth that God has spoken all along.

It is essential to distinguish this genuine repentance from what may be called the remorse of exposure. There are men and women who weep bitterly over their sins, but whose tears flow, not from a holy sorrow for having offended God, but from the shame of having been discovered by their neighbours. The apostle Paul draws this distinction with precision: “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without

regret, whereas worldly grief produces death” (2 Cor. 7:10). The LORD knows the hearts of men, and He is not deceived by tears that fall, not before His throne, but before the court of human opinion.

This is why the brokenness of repentance carries within it both the weight of holy grief and the lightness of divine liberation. It is the grief that knows itself seen, seen by the holy God, and yet met, not with condemnation, but with compassion. For the prophet concludes his summons with a promise: “he will abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:7). The brokenness God accepts is the brokenness that comes to Him, and He who calls the broken to Himself is “faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn. 1:9).

A. The Poverty of Spirit: Hating Sin Before a Holy God

The Lord Jesus opens His great Sermon on the Mount with a beatitude that every comfortable religion resists: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). And immediately following: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:4). These are not peripheral observations. They are the threshold of the kingdom. The life of discipleship begins not with achievement but with poverty; not with confidence but with mourning.

To be poor in spirit is to know, with a knowledge that penetrates to the marrow, that before God one has nothing to commend oneself. It is the spiritual condition that the old Puritans called “self-emptying,” the recognition that the self has no reserves of righteousness sufficient to meet the demands of a holy God. This is what it means to truly hate one’s sin: not a pathological self-loathing that destroys human dignity, but the soul’s honest assessment of its own sinfulness in the blazing light of divine holiness.

It is this poverty of spirit that makes the new birth intelligible. When the Lord Jesus speaks to Nicodemus, the learned Pharisee who had accomplished much by the standards of religious culture, He does not offer him an additional discipline or a higher moral grade. He says: “Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:3).

Nicodemus must begin again, from the beginning. It is not the beginning of moral effort, but the beginning that only God can supply: birth from above, by water and the Spirit (Jn. 3:5). This new birth is not triggered by human merit; it is received by a soul that has been broken of the pretension that it can supply its own righteousness.

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”

— John 3:6–7

The repentant soul, standing in the poverty of spirit, genuinely hates the sin that has kept it from God. It does not hate sin with the self-centred hatred of one who regrets the consequences, but with the God-centred hatred of one who has glimpsed, however briefly, the beauty and holiness of the One against whom sin is committed. “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Ps. 51:4). So cried the broken David, who understood that the deepest offence in every sin is the offence against God Himself. This is the poverty of spirit that opens the door of the kingdom.

“Blessed are those who mourn.” The mourning of repentance is not the mourning of the hopeless. It is the mourning of those who have seen the gap between who they are and who God is, and who have heard, in that very seeing, the promise of the Comforter. For the Holy Spirit is the one who “will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (Jn. 16:8), and it is He who leads the broken soul not into despair but into the arms of the Saviour.

B. Love as the Fruit of Genuine Repentance: The Turning Outward

Genuine repentance does not leave the soul permanently turned inward upon itself. A repentance that ends in perpetual introspection has not yet completed its work. Indeed, it has not yet been liberated to do the work it was designed to do. For when the soul has been broken of its self-centredness before God, it is freed to love, and the most decisive proof

that this freedom has been granted is the capacity to love those who are hardest to love.

The Lord Jesus makes this connection explicit: “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:44). The love of enemies is not natural to the human heart in its unregenerate condition. It is the fruit of a heart that has been broken of its pride by the gospel, that has seen how God loved it when it was His enemy (Rom. 5:8–10), and that, in that seeing, has been given a new capacity to extend the same undeserved love to others. Repentance, rightly understood, is always the beginning of love.

The apostle John anchors this reality in the very nature of God: “We love because he first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19). The soul that has genuinely repented has experienced, in the deepest place, the reality of being loved first: loved before it deserved it, loved before it turned, loved in the very act of turning. This experience of being the recipient of a love that did not wait for merit is precisely what dismantles the pride that makes it impossible to love enemies. The broken heart knows that it, too, was once the enemy, and was loved nonetheless.

“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

— Romans 5:6–8

The practical implication for the Christian life is far-reaching. A congregation of genuinely repentant believers will be characterized not by harsh judgment of those who sin, for they know they are sinners themselves, but by the patient, costly love that reflects the character of the One who gave His only Son for the sake of His enemies. Repentance is not a private affair between the individual soul and God. It is the foundation of the community of love that is the Church, and its fruits are always visible in the quality of relationships that form within and around that community.

C. The Fruits That Confirm Genuine Repentance

John the Baptist, confronted by crowds coming to him in the wilderness, including religious leaders who may have understood repentance as a formal category rather than a transformative reality, issued a challenge that cut through all religious pretension: “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matt. 3:8). The fruit is not the repentance; but the absence of fruit calls the repentance into question.

The apostle Paul, writing to the church in Corinth about godly grief, provides the most detailed New Testament account of what genuine repentance produces: “For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter” (2 Cor. 7:11). The fruits of repentance are specific, concrete, and verifiable. They are not a vague feeling of remorse, but a transformation of attitude and action that demonstrates the reality of the inner turning.

The story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19 is the New Testament’s most vivid enacted portrait of repentance and its fruits. Before Jesus has formally pronounced anything about his salvation, Zacchaeus stands and declares: “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold” (Lk. 19:8). This is the spontaneous logic of repentance. The broken heart does not merely stop the old sin. It runs in the opposite direction, undoing the harm it has caused, making restitution where restitution is possible, and demonstrating by its actions what has happened in its interior.

The brokenness of repentance, then, is not a momentary crisis but a posture that shapes the whole of the Christian life. The believer who truly repents of sin does not merely regret it. He hates it, turns from it, and bears in his life the ongoing fruit of that turning: a life marked by growing love, deepening humility, and the consistent pattern of the confession that keeps the conscience clean and the fellowship with God unbroken. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn. 1:9).

Reflection Questions — Chapter 1

1. I distinguish between genuine repentance (*homologēō*, agreeing with God about sin) and the remorse of being found out by men. How do you identify the difference in your own experience? What is it about genuine repentance that produces freedom rather than merely sorrow?
2. The love of enemies is described here as one of the key fruits of repentance. How does your church community cultivate a culture of forgiveness and love toward those who have wronged it? In what ways might a deeper communal practice of repentance transform the quality of relationships within your congregation?
3. John the Baptist demanded that repentance produce visible fruit (Matt. 3:8). Is there an area of your life where you have repeatedly sought God's forgiveness but have not yet allowed that repentance to produce concrete fruits of changed behaviour, restored relationship, or made restitution? What one specific step could you take this week?

CHAPTER 2

Spiritual Brokenness by Regeneration

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

— Romans 12:1

If repentance is the turning of the will, regeneration is the renewal of the nature. These are not competing categories but complementary dimensions of the one divine work of salvation. The soul that turns toward God in repentance does not do so in its own strength. It turns because the Spirit of God has first done something in it, something that the apostle Paul calls the making alive of the spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1, 4–5). And yet, conversely, the ongoing life of the regenerate soul is one of continual repentance: a life that keeps turning, keeps confessing, keeps choosing God over self, day after day.

The regeneration of the soul is, in the biblical description, an act of new creation. The apostle states it with an economy that leaves no room for qualification: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17). This is not the language of moral improvement or spiritual education. It is the language of the cosmos. The same God who said “Let there be light” and light came into being has spoken a new word over the soul of the believing sinner, and in the speaking of that word, a new creature has come into existence, with new desires, a new direction, and a new ultimate loyalty.

The apostle Paul, in Romans 12, addresses believers who have already experienced this divine work of regeneration. The great doctrinal affirmations of chapters 1–11 (justification by faith alone, union with Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, election, and glorification) have been set forth. Now the apostle turns to the practical question: how does the

regenerate person live? His answer begins not with a list of commands but with an appeal to the very mercies of God that have already been extended. The “therefore” of Romans 12:1 is crucial: the transformed life does not precede the experience of God’s mercy. It flows from it.

The brokenness of regeneration is the brokenness of the self that has encountered the mercies of God and has been unable to remain unchanged. It is the brokenness of the man who, like the apostle himself, can no longer say “I” in the old way, for “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). This is the brokenness of the new creation: not the destruction of the person, but the death of the old self and the birth of the new.

A. Not Conformed to This World: The Repudiation of Worldliness

The first great command of Romans 12:2 is a prohibition against being conformed to this world. The Greek verb Paul employs, *suschēmatizesthe*, carries the image of being pressed into a mould, forced into a shape that is not one’s own. The world has a relentless pressure: it seeks to press every soul into its own image, to make every life conform to its priorities, its pleasures, and its understanding of what constitutes a good and successful human existence. The regenerate soul must resist this pressure, not by withdrawal from the world, but by refusing to let the world define ultimate values.

For the believer, the issue of worldliness is not primarily about external practices. These may be symptoms, but they are not the disease itself. The disease is a disposition of the heart: the willingness to allow the standards, values, and ultimate concerns of the present age to govern one’s life as though they were final. The apostle John puts it plainly: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world” (1 Jn. 2:15–16).

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

— Romans 12:2

The regenerate soul is one that has been broken from this conformity, not by its own determination, but by the transforming work of the Spirit who has given it new objects of desire. The person who has been made a new creation in Christ does not simply resolve to resist the world by an act of raw willpower. Rather, something has shifted at the level of desire itself: the things that once seemed most glorious (the approval of men, the accumulation of wealth, the pleasures of the flesh) have lost their ultimate grip, because the soul has tasted something incomparably better. This is the logic of repudiation: not a gritting of the teeth, but a turning of the heart toward what is infinitely more satisfying.

B. Transformed by the Renewing of the Mind

The prohibition of conformation is immediately paired with a positive command: “be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). The Greek word here, *metamorphoō*, is the same word used to describe the transfiguration of Jesus (Matt. 17:2), and it suggests not a surface adjustment but a fundamental change in the interior structure of the person. This transformation is not self-induced. It is something that happens to the person who submits to the renewing work of God’s Word and Spirit.

The renewal of the mind means, at its core, the progressive bringing of every thought, assumption, and habitual way of seeing the world into conformity with the revelation of God in Scripture. This is what Augustine meant when he described the restless heart finding its rest in God: the mind, which had organized itself around false ultimates, is reorganized around the true Ultimate, who is God Himself. And as the mind is renewed, the whole life follows: what we think determines what we love, what we love determines what we pursue, and what we pursue shapes what we become.

The apostle points to the goal of this renewal: “that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2). The renewed mind develops, over time, the capacity for spiritual discernment, the ability to recognize the will of God in the complexities and ambiguities of ordinary life. This is not an esoteric faculty; it is the practical wisdom that grows in the soul that feeds consistently on the Word of God, prays with regularity, and submits habitually to the community of discernment that is the local church.

The apostle Paul provides a practical program for the renewal of the mind in his letter to the Philippians: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil. 4:8). This list is not a counsel of pious escapism. It is a map of the contours of the mind that is being renewed toward God. Every thought, word, and act can be evaluated by these criteria, and the soul that habitually applies them is a soul whose mind is being progressively transformed into the likeness of Christ.

C. The Living Sacrifice: Presenting Body and Life to God

The concrete, bodily dimension of the regenerate life must not be overlooked. The apostle does not say merely “present your souls” or “present your minds” as a living sacrifice. He says “your bodies,” the whole physical, material self, with all its appetites, capacities, and limitations. This is a deliberate echo of the Old Testament sacrificial system: in the Temple, animals were slain and offered to God. But in the new covenant, the offering God requires is not an animal’s death. It is the believer’s life: “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom. 12:1).

The genius of this phrase is the tension it contains. A living sacrifice is a sacrifice that keeps getting up from the altar. The old covenant sacrificial animal had no choice in the matter; it was killed and did not

return. But the living sacrifice of Romans 12:1 is called to a continuous, daily, voluntary act of self-offering, presenting the body, with all its normal activities and relationships and duties, to God as an act of worship. The apostle calls this “your spiritual worship,” or more literally in the Greek, your *logikēn latreian*, your rational, Word-governed, reasonable service.

This means that the regenerate life is not a life that happens in church and is suspended for the rest of the week. It is a life of perpetual worship: the worship of the mechanic who works with integrity, the teacher who instructs with care, the parent who disciplines with love, the neighbour who gives without calculation. Every ordinary act, performed in the awareness of the divine Presence and in gratitude for divine mercy, becomes an act of sacrifice, an offering on the altar of the living God.

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

— 1 Corinthians 6:19–20

The brokenness of regeneration, then, is not a once-for-all crisis but a daily discipline. It is the discipline of the soul that, every morning, places itself afresh on the altar and says again what the apostle said: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). And in that daily re-presentation of the self to God, the regenerate life finds both its form and its freedom: the form of the cross, and the freedom of the resurrection.

Reflection Questions — Chapter 2

1. The apostle Paul grounded his appeal for transformed living in “the mercies of God” (Rom. 12:1). How does your understanding of the specific mercies of God (justification, adoption, sanctification, glorification) shape the way you approach the practical demands of Christian living? In what ways might a deeper grasp of those mercies transform your motivation for obedience?

2. The “renewing of the mind” (Rom. 12:2) is a communal as well as a personal process. What structures does your congregation have in place to help believers bring their thinking into conformity with Scripture in the areas of finance, family, vocation, and civic life? Where do you see gaps in this communal dimension of transformation?
3. Consider the idea of the “living sacrifice,” the continuous, voluntary act of self-offering in every area of daily life. Is there a specific domain (your work, your relationships, your finances, your time) that you have not yet consciously placed on the altar? What would it mean to offer that area to God as an act of rational worship beginning this week?

CHAPTER 3

**Spiritual Brokenness from Wrong Doctrines:
Toward Reformation**

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

— 2 Timothy 3:16–17

The brokenness that God accepts is not only the individual, interior brokenness of the repentant soul and the spiritually regenerate life. It is also, and this is a truth the Church has too often forgotten, the corporate brokenness of a community that has discovered it has been wrong, and has had the courage to say so. The great Reformation of the sixteenth century was born precisely from this kind of brokenness: the brokenness of men and women who, reading the Scripture afresh and comparing what they found there with the doctrine and practice of the institutional church, were moved to repent on behalf of the community of faith, to call the Church back to its foundations, and to submit both belief and behaviour to the lordship of the Word of God.

The reformers were not primarily innovators. They were recoverers. Their great cry was not novelty but antiquity: a return to the original sources, a reformation of the Church according to the pattern of the Word. And their conviction, enshrined in the Latin phrase *Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda* (“the reformed church, always reforming”), was that this work of reformation is not a one-time achievement but a continuing discipline. Every generation of the Church must submit itself afresh to the searching light of Scripture, repent of the doctrinal and practical errors it has accumulated, and seek to bring both its beliefs and its life into conformity with the whole counsel of God.

This is the third dimension of the brokenness God pardons: the brokenness of reformation. It is not the brokenness of calamity or of

accident, but the brokenness that results from the confrontation of human tradition with divine truth, the willingness to say, “We have been wrong. Scripture says otherwise. We must change.” This is the brokenness of intellectual and ecclesiastical humility, and it is as essential to the life of the Church as personal repentance is to the life of the individual believer.

The apostle Paul declares the theological foundation of this ongoing reforming work with characteristic precision: Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). The inspired Scripture is the instrument of reproof and correction. It is not merely the confirmation of what the community already believes, but the living, active Word that identifies error and calls for its correction.

A. From Wrong Doctrine to Orthodoxy: The Reformation of Belief

The Lord Jesus describes His disciples as “the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13), and He adds a warning that the Church must hear with soberness: “But if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.” Salt that has lost its preserving power is useless, not merely ineffective, but positively a deception. And the Church that has lost its doctrinal integrity, that has traded the sharp, preserving truth of the gospel for the insipid accommodation of contemporary taste, is precisely that salt.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

— Matthew 5:14–16

The history of Christian doctrine is, in large part, the history of the Church’s ongoing struggle to protect and recover orthodox teaching

from the corrosive influence of error. The great heresies of the early centuries (Arianism, which denied the full deity of the Son; Pelagianism, which denied the radical corruption of the human will; Gnosticism, which denied the goodness of material creation) were not the inventions of crude opponents of the faith. They arose within the community of the Church, from thinkers who believed they were serving the gospel by making it more palatable to the culture of their day. The Church resisted them, at great cost, because it understood that a gospel distorted is not the gospel at all.

The Reformation of the sixteenth century was, at its core, a recovery of orthodox soteriology, the doctrine of how sinners are made right with God. Against the medieval teaching that salvation required the cooperation of human merit with divine grace, the reformers recovered the apostolic declaration of Scripture. The doctrine of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) was not a new teaching. It was the recovery of a teaching that had been buried under the accumulation of centuries of tradition. And the Church today must be willing to undertake the same reforming work: to test every doctrine, every tradition, every teaching, against the norm of Scripture, and to repent boldly when Scripture's verdict is against us.

B. From Wrong Deeds to Christian Orthopraxy: The Reformation of Life

Correct doctrine without correct conduct is hypocrisy, and hypocrisy is, in the end, its own form of heresy. The apostle James makes this point with a directness that admits no softening: "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?" (Jas. 2:14). The answer implied is clear: a faith that produces no works of righteousness is not saving faith. And a Church that holds correct doctrine while conducting its life by the patterns of the world is not the salt of the earth. It is salt that has lost its taste.

The apostolic appeal of Romans 12:1–2 is simultaneously a doctrine and a demand. The demand to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice"

is not a mere addendum to the theology of grace; it is the theological consequence of the theology of grace. When grace has truly been received, it cannot remain theoretical. It presses outward into action. It demands the reformation of the practical life: of habits, relationships, financial dealings, ethical choices, and the whole range of what the Reformed tradition has called “the Christian life in the world.” As Abraham Kuyper rightly insisted, there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, “Mine!”

The reformation of life requires the same courage as the reformation of doctrine. It requires the willingness to be told by Scripture that patterns of behaviour long assumed to be normal (patterns of consumption, of ambition, of family life, of care for the poor, of treatment of enemies) are, in fact, patterns that contradict the gospel. And it requires the will to change: to submit those patterns to the searching light of the Word, to confess where they have fallen short, and to pursue, by the grace of the Spirit, a manner of life that is worthy of the gospel of Christ (Phil. 1:27).

C. The Ongoing Work of Reformation: Always Reforming

The Bereans in Acts 17 are commended not for the sophistication of their theological tradition, nor for their uncritical acceptance of apostolic authority, but for this: “they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11). This is the posture of the reforming community: eagerness for the Word, willingness to test every teaching (including the teaching of apostolic figures) against the Scripture, and submission to whatever the Scripture declares. The Bereans were noble precisely because they were not passive. They were active, engaged, searching, and willing to be corrected.

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

— Hebrews 4:12

A community that reads this Word with honesty and submission will always find itself being reformed by it. This is not because Scripture changes, but because the community of believers is always in the process of growing into a fuller understanding of what Scripture declares, and always in the process of repenting of the ways in which its life has fallen short of what Scripture requires. This is the living quality of the Word of God: it is never exhausted, never fully mastered, always reforming those who submit to it.

The work of reformation, then, is the ongoing work of the Church. It is not the achievement of a particular council or confessional moment, but the perpetual, humble discipline of a community that holds its traditions with an open hand, submits its practices to the Word, repents of what the Word condemns, and pursues what the Word commends. This is the brokenness of the reforming Church: the willingness to be always on the way, never fully arrived, always measuring itself against the Word and finding in that measurement both the call to repent and the grace to change.

Reflection Questions — Chapter 3

1. The reformers held that the Church is “always reforming” according to the Word of God. In your own theological tradition or congregation, what doctrines or practices might benefit from a fresh examination in the light of Scripture? What would it require, personally and corporately, to engage that examination with humility and courage?
2. The chapter argues that orthodox doctrine without orthopraxy (right belief without right practice) is a form of hypocrisy. Where do you see the greatest gaps between stated belief and actual practice in the Christian community around you? What role do you personally have in addressing those gaps?

3. The Bereans searched the Scriptures daily to test the teaching they received (Acts 17:11). How do you practise this kind of ongoing doctrinal vigilance in your own life? What would it look like to make the regular, searching examination of Scripture a more central discipline of your faith community?

Conclusion

The threefold brokenness examined in these pages (the brokenness of repentance, the brokenness of regeneration, the brokenness of reformation) is not, in the end, three separate experiences. It is one experience, seen from three angles: the angle of the will, the angle of the nature, and the angle of the community. The person who has genuinely repented has, in that very act, been drawn by the regenerating work of the Spirit; and the Spirit who regenerates is the same Spirit who brings the Church to its ongoing reformation according to the Word of God.

The prophet's invitation stands: "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near" (Isa. 55:6). The urgency of this invitation is not an expression of divine caprice. It is rather the pastoral urgency of Scripture for a world that is always at risk of the most catastrophic of all failures: the failure to turn. The hardened heart that cannot be broken is the heart that is in the greatest danger, not because God has abandoned it, but because it has not yet allowed itself to be found.

What God accepts, what He pardons, what He receives with the abundant mercy that the prophet promised, is not religious performance, not accumulated theological sophistication, not the church membership card or the perfect attendance record. He accepts the broken and the contrite. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Ps. 51:17). And the brokenness He accepts is always the brokenness that comes through the three doors of this volume: the door of repentance, through which the sinner turns from his way; the door of regeneration, through which the Spirit makes him a new creation; and the door of reformation, through which the community of faith submits itself afresh to the whole counsel of God.

The apostle John summarizes what the believer who walks through these three doors receives: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn.

1:9). The Lord Jesus declares the condition of the new birth: “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5). The apostle Paul describes the mark of the person who belongs to Christ: “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you” (Rom. 8:9). And the program of the renewed life is set forth with the clarity of a mandate: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom. 12:2).

These four realities (pardon, new birth, the indwelling Spirit, and the transforming renewal of the mind) are the great gifts that await the soul that comes to God broken. They are not prizes earned by the perfection of brokenness; they are the gifts that God pours out upon the imperfect brokenness of souls who simply come, who seek Him while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near, forsake their ways, and return to the LORD their God.

Come broken. Come honestly. Come with the poverty of spirit that knows it has nothing to offer but itself. And receive the abundant pardon that God has promised to every soul that comes.

Soli Deo gloria.

Personal Questions and Challenges

On Repentance and the Life of Confession

1. Scripture teaches that every believer who says he has no sin deceives himself (1 Jn. 1:8), and yet it equally assures us that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1 Jn. 1:9). How regularly do you practise the discipline of specific, named confession before God: not the general admission of being a sinner, but the naming of particular sins in particular situations? What would a more consistent practice of this confession look like in your daily life?
2. The Church is the community of the forgiven, and corporate repentance is as biblical as personal repentance. How does your congregation create space for the regular, communal confession of sin in its gathered worship? In what ways might the practice of corporate confession strengthen the bonds of fellowship and the witness of your church to its surrounding community?
3. Repentance is not complete without the fruits that confirm it (Matt. 3:8). Is there a relationship in your life that has been broken by your sin, which you have confessed to God but not yet repaired with the person you wronged? What is one concrete act of restitution or restoration that genuine repentance calls you to take in the coming week? (1 Jn. 1:9; 2:1)

On Regeneration and Transformation

1. The apostle Paul describes the regenerate person as a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17), not an improved version of the old self, but a fundamentally new kind of person. In what specific ways has your life been genuinely changed since coming to faith in Christ? And in what areas do you sense that the Spirit’s transforming work is still incomplete, where you still find yourself pressing toward the old mould rather than the new creation? (2 Cor. 5:14–16)

2. The renewal of the mind (Rom. 12:2) requires sustained, intentional engagement with the Word of God. What disciplines of Scripture reading, theological reflection, and communal discernment does your congregation practise to help its members think Christianly about the specific challenges of their daily lives, in their vocations, their families, their civic responsibilities, and their use of cultural media?
3. The “living sacrifice” of Romans 12:1 is a continuous, daily, voluntary act. Is there a specific area of your daily life (your professional work, your household habits, your financial decisions, your use of leisure time) that you have not yet consciously offered to God as an act of worship? What would it look like to present that area to Him as a living sacrifice this week, and to begin living in it as an act of spiritual service? (2 Cor. 5:17–21)

On Reformation: Doctrine and Life

1. The reformers insisted that the Church must always be reforming according to the Word of God (*semper reformanda*). What doctrinal beliefs do you hold that you have never carefully tested against the whole of Scripture? What would it require, in terms of intellectual humility, community support, and time in the Word, to begin that examination with genuine openness to correction? (Rom. 12:1–2)
2. The chapter argues that orthodoxy without orthopraxy is hypocrisy. Where is the greatest gap between what your church formally teaches and what its members actually practise, in the areas of generosity, forgiveness, care for the vulnerable, or the integration of faith and daily work? What would it look like to begin closing that gap within your own sphere of influence? (Rom. 12:1–2)
3. The Bereans examined the Scriptures daily to test what they were taught (Acts 17:11). What is one specific teaching you have received that you have never personally tested against the whole of Scripture? Commit to spending time examining that teaching carefully in the Word, and to following wherever Scripture leads, even if it requires you to revise a belief you have long held. (Rom. 12:2)

Glossary

Arianism: An early Christian error, named after a priest called Arius, which taught that the Son of God was a created being and not fully and eternally God.

Brokenness: In this book, the humbled condition of a heart that has seen its sin before a holy God and turns to Him for mercy. It is not despair or calamity, but the posture that God accepts and pardons.

Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda: A Latin saying of the Reformation meaning “the reformed church, always reforming.” The Church must keep measuring its beliefs and its life against Scripture and correct whatever does not agree with it.

Glorification: The final stage of salvation, when God raises His people and makes them completely like Christ, free from sin and death forever.

Gnosticism: An early movement that claimed salvation came through secret knowledge and that the material world was evil. The Church rejected it because Scripture teaches that God made the material creation good.

Homologēō: The Greek word translated “confess” in 1 John 1:9. It means “to say the same thing,” that is, to agree with God about our sin.

Justification: The act of God by which He declares a sinner righteous in His sight, on the ground of Christ’s work alone and received by faith alone.

Logikēn latreian: The Greek phrase in Romans 12:1 translated “spiritual worship.” It can also mean “reasonable service,” the worship of the whole person in line with God’s Word.

Metamorphoō: The Greek word translated “transformed” in Romans 12:2. It describes a deep change from within, the same word used for the transfiguration of Jesus.

Orthodoxy: Right belief. It means holding the teaching of Scripture as the Church has faithfully confessed it.

Orthopraxy: Right practice. It means living out in daily conduct what Scripture teaches us to believe.

Pelagianism: An early Christian error, named after a teacher called Pelagius, which denied that human nature is deeply corrupted by sin and taught that people can obey God without special help from His grace.

Regeneration: The new birth, in which the Holy Spirit gives spiritual life to a person who was dead in sin, creating new desires and a new nature.

Sanctification: The ongoing work of the Holy Spirit by which believers are set apart for God and made more like Christ in heart and conduct.

Sola fide: A Latin phrase meaning “faith alone.” It names the Reformation teaching that sinners are made right with God by faith alone, apart from their own works.

Soteriology: The doctrine of salvation, which studies how God saves sinners and brings them to Himself.

Suschēmatisesthe: The Greek word translated “be conformed” in Romans 12:2. It carries the picture of being pressed into a mould shaped by the world.

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About the Author

Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar is a Pastor Emeritus who holds the degrees of Th.B. (Bachelor of Theology), A.B. (Bachelor of Arts), and D.D. (Doctor of Divinity). He has devoted his life and ministry to the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the rigorous theological formation of God's people, and the equipping of pastoral leaders for faithful and effective ministry in church and society.

Pastor Bal served for many years as a pastor and theological educator, and has been a central figure in the work of Holistic Enhancement for Lay-leaders and Pastors (HELP, Inc.), a parachurch ministry committed to equipping the whole people of God for faithful service across every sphere of life. His monthly theological lectures to the HELP, Inc. fellowship have addressed the most foundational questions of the Christian faith, and these studies, expanded, deepened, and formatted for print, have shaped the theological works he continues to write.

His theological formation reflects sustained engagement with the whole of the Reformed and evangelical tradition. Among those whose thought has most shaped his own are Augustine of Hippo, John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, Louis Berkhof, Benjamin B. Warfield, Oscar Cullmann, Herman Dooyeweerd, Karl Barth, Paul Jewett, Francis Schaeffer, R.C. Sproul, and Ravi Zacharias. He reads every theological question through the lens of the whole counsel of God, and has spent a lifetime teaching others to do the same.

The present work, *Brokenness God Pardons*, represents Pastor Bal's sustained theological engagement with the theme of brokenness as the necessary posture of the soul before a holy and merciful God. Drawing on Scripture, the Reformed tradition, and a lifetime of pastoral ministry, he examines the three dimensions of brokenness that God accepts and pardons: repentance, regeneration, and reformation. This work invites the reader not merely to understand brokenness theologically but to

experience it personally, and, through it, to receive the abundant pardon that God has promised.

Other theological works by the author:

Spiritual Unity and Personal Diversity in Christ
Why God Did Decree and Allow Evil to Exist
What the Christian Church Should Be
The Reformed Theological Paradigm
The Holy Loving Triune Lord God
The Athanasian Creed Understood by Faith
Biblical Christian Cosmoscope
Biblical Leadership Is Shepherding
Biblical Salvation: A Study in Soteriology
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The Seven Churches of Revelation
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The Seventy Weeks of Daniel
Six Calvinistic Schools on Soteriology
The Thinking Process of the Christian Mind
The Threefold Understanding of Salvation
The Truth of Divine Election
Vital Words Related to Salvation
The Work of the Holy Spirit

He lives with his beloved wife, Estrella. He is the father of Dr. Ellazar and Zarelle Grace. He continues to preach, teach, write, and intercede for the reformation and renewal of the Church of Jesus Christ, until the day when faith gives way to sight and the knowledge that is now partial becomes the knowledge that is full.

Soli Deo gloria.