

The Fruit of Repentance

Genesis 42-43

Why does Joseph ask his brothers to return with Benjamin? He wants to see if they have changed. Jacob still struggles with favoritism. Would the brothers treat Benjamin as they did Joseph?

The narrative hinges on dramatic irony—the literary device of allowing the reader to know something that characters in the story do not.

Why do the brothers fail to recognize him (42:8)? He is over 20 years older, he looks Egyptian, speaks Egyptian, and is “lord” over Egypt.

We all have some level of guilt (42:21).

This verse probably contains some bad theology in the sense that the brothers think bad things are happening to them because of a previous transgression. But if morality was this formulaic, we would live under enslavement and fear.

“If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand” (Psalm 130:3).

This being said, God has granted us the gift of conscience and the moral economy; the reality of good and evil.

What this verse certainly shows is the dilemma of unresolved guilt. Many of us have experienced guilt and we long for absolution.

Sanctification often works incrementally and in diverse ways (42:37, 43:8-10).

Astoundingly, right when Pharaoh wants to recognize Joseph as the only person who can help, Joseph says that only God can help. How many of us would be prepared to take credit?

By giving his sons Hebrew names, Joseph credits God with a.) allowing him to forget his pain and b.) making him fruitful in tough circumstances. In this sense, he remembers how God has delivered him.

Joseph wants to see if the brothers are truthful (42:16, 20).

The brothers, collectively, insist that they are “honest men” (42:11). They do seem to have a greater appreciation for truth (Gen. 42:29). Reuben seems to have changed little. He, once again, wants to let his brothers know that he is morally superior (42:22). He then makes a deal but wagers his own sons (42:37).

Judah, on the other hand, has changed drastically. He assumes responsibility and wants to preserve the family (43:8f.). He has moved on from his embarrassing past (Gen. 37:26, Gen. 38).

Sanctification is a progressive movement of becoming more Christ-like. While every Christian ought to mature, it looks different in each person.

Joseph displays God’s grace (43:23, 29).

God told Joseph that his brothers would bow down to him (Gen. 37:5-11). At times this looked impossible. How could God ever deliver on what He said? Then we see, through the most unlikely ways, that the dream is fulfilled. The brothers do bow to Joseph (42:6, 43:26, 28).

Sometimes we are aware of God’s promise being fulfilled (Joseph), and sometimes we are not (the brothers).

In light of God’s working, Joseph displays God’s grace. How easy it would have been for him to exact revenge on his brothers.

Key Take-Away: Hand your guilt over to Christ (2 Cor. 7:10).

Application Questions:

What do we do with a guilty conscience? How does Christ offer something different than other religions?

How does this narrative show us that God’s timing is always perfect?

Why is grace superior to revenge? How does God’s grace move us towards greater spiritual maturity?