

Back to Basics: Repentance Unto Salvation

Continuing on with our series of back to basic lessons surrounding the Gospel plan of salvation, we will examine the part repentance plays in the life of the believer and disciple of Christ.

It is not difficult to see that the greatest teacher ever, Jesus Christ, preached repentance as part of His earthly ministry. As Mark records it,

"Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent, and believe the Gospel'" (Mark 1:14-15).

Jesus also said in Luke 13:3 and Luke 13:5, ***"I tell you, no: but, except you repent, you shall all likewise perish."***

So we can see that when the very Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, appeared upon the scene in His public ministry, He came preaching the narrow and exclusive doctrines of repentance and faith. If Jesus felt compelled to preach such a message before a lost and dying world, so should we. Galatians 1:6-9 teaches that there is only one Gospel, and if any gospel message leaves out the doctrine of repentance or any aspect of the Gospel plan of salvation, you can be assured it is a false gospel.

Who is commanded to repent? Everyone is! Paul stated in Acts 17:30, ***"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men everywhere to repent. . . ."***

The words "repent," "repentance," and "repented" are mentioned over 100 times in the Bible. There has been a lot of misunderstanding and confusion over what the word ***repentance*** means. When the word "repent" is used in the word of God in the context of Biblical salvation, it is referring to a truly God-given, Spirit-led through the word of Christ change of heart and mind toward God about sin. This is what the Apostle Peter was saying in Acts 3:19 when he said, ***"Repent therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out. . . ."***

Many understand the term "repentance" to mean "turning from sin." This is true, but it is not complete. In the Bible, the word "repent" means to "change your mind," to "think differently or afterwards," to "reconsider." The Bible also tells us that true repentance will result in a change of actions (Luke 3:8-14 and Acts 3:19). Acts 26:20 declares, ***"I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds."*** The full Biblical definition of repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of action.

What, then, is the connection between repentance and salvation? The Book of Acts seems especially to focus on repentance in regards to salvation (Acts 2:38;

Acts 3:19; Acts 11:18; Acts 17:30; Acts 20:21; and Acts 26:20). To repent, in relation to salvation, is to change your mind in regards to Jesus Christ. In Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts chapter 2), he concludes with a call for the people to repent (Acts 2:38). Repent from what? It seems that in addition to repenting of their sins, Peter is calling the people who rejected Jesus (Acts 2:36) to change their minds about Him, to recognize that He is indeed "**Lord and Christ**" (Acts 2:36). Peter is calling the people to change their minds from rejection of Christ as the Messiah, to faith in Him as both Messiah and Savior.

Repentance and faith can be understood as "two sides of the same coin." It is impossible to place your faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior without first changing your mind about Who He is and what He has done. Whether it is repentance from willful rejection, or repentance from ignorance or disinterest – it is a change of mind. Biblical repentance, in relation to salvation, is changing your mind from rejection of Christ, which is a sin in and of itself, to faith in Christ.

It is crucially important that we understand repentance is not a work we do to earn salvation. No one can repent and come to God unless God pulls that person to Him. As Jesus said in John 6:44, "**No man can come to Me, except the Father Who sent Me draws him: and I will raise him up in the last day.**" And as we discussed last week the way one is drawn by the Father is through hearing the word of Christ. This is how one gets faith, just as Paul wrote in Romans 10:17: "**So belief comes of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.**"

We have a couple of interesting passages in the Book of Acts that deal with repentance, and these are found in Acts 5:30-31 and Acts 11:18.

"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, Whom you slew, hanging Him on a tree. Him did God exalt with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins." (Acts 5:30-31)

"And when they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also has God granted repentance unto life.'" (Acts 11:18)

The Greek word translated "to give" in Acts 5:31 and "granted" in Acts 11:18 is *didomi*, which means **to give**, so these verses indicate that **repentance** is something that God **gives** us. But just as we have seen with God calling us through the word, it is also through the word of Christ that God gives us repentance. God **gives** or **grants** repentance in the same sense that God's grace is made available to all and that God's longsuffering leads us to repentance (2 Peter 3:9), as does His kindness (Romans 2:4), and those who are open to hearing and receiving the truth of the Gospel, which allows us to receive His mercy through our obedience, are then said to be given repentance by God. We all have free will, so God has granted us the option either to reject or accept

that we must repent in order to be granted His mercy. As Paul stated in Romans 1:16-17,

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith: as it is written, ‘But the righteous shall live by faith.’”

We are called and drawn by God through the hearing and accepting of the Gospel plan of salvation. Therein lies the power of God to grant salvation to all that believe through their obedient, saving faith. It is only possible because of His grace that anyone will be saved. No one can repent unless they have been convicted of their error through the power of the Gospel. Every aspect of the Gospel plan of salvation is a result of God's drawing us, opening our eyes, and changing our hearts through our hearing and heeding the word of Christ. It is not about us, it is about Him!

While repentance is not a work that earns salvation, repentance unto salvation does result in works. It is impossible to truly and fully change your mind without that causing a change in action. In the Bible, repentance results in a change in behavior. That is why John the Baptist called people to “. . . ***produce fruit in keeping with repentance***” (Matthew 3:8). A person who has truly repented from rejection of Christ to faith in Christ will give evidence of a changed life (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 5:19-23; James 2:14-26). Repentance, properly defined, is necessary for salvation. Biblical repentance is changing your mind about Jesus Christ and your former life of sin and turning to God in faith for salvation (Acts 3:19). Turning from sin is the result of genuine, faith-based repentance towards the Lord Jesus Christ.

The greatest need for any sinner is to have his sins blotted out, but a man will never have the pardon of sin while he is in love with his sin. There must be a hatred of sin, a loathing of it, and a turning from it. Repentance is a revolution in dealing with our attitude and view towards sin and righteousness. Repentance is not something one does with one's hands, but it is an inward attitude of the soul. Sin must become, in the eyes of the sinner, exceedingly sinful, and the fact of the matter is that all sinners are condemned.

Everyone knows he or she is not perfect, but for most sinners that is consolation, not condemnation. But the Bible declares all sinners are already condemned:

“For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believes on Him is not condemned: but he that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:17-18).

The problem is "**. . . all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God**" (Romans 3:23). The good, the bad, the rich, the poor, the old, the young, the educated, and the uneducated – every man must repent because we are all sinners. Notice it is God's command that is to be obeyed, and obeyed **now**.

Man, in his lost, sinful, condemned state, has failed to glorify God. Until a person becomes personally exceedingly sinful in his own eyes, he will never see his need for repentance. Ephesians 2:1 says man is spiritually dead; Romans 3:10 and Isaiah 64:6 tells us no one is righteous before a holy God; Romans 3:19 says all stand guilty and condemned before God; Ephesians 4:18 declares all sinners are separated from God whose hearts and minds are blinded so that they cannot understand God or the things of God.

Repentance basically involves two facts: the fact of sin and the fact of God's grace. If a person is not a sinner, he would not need to repent, and if God was not the God of all grace, it would do no good to repent. Our repentance is in response to the gift of salvation offered by God through His Son, Jesus, and those who reject this offer stand condemned. As Paul says in Romans 2:4, "**Or do you despise the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?**" Repentance implies sin, sorrow for it, and a changed attitude towards God about it. Paul also tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:25, "**. . . in meekness correcting them that oppose themselves; if peradventure God may give them repentance unto the knowledge of the truth. . . .**" Once again, through the grace of God correction is granted to those who respond to the call to repentance through the word of truth, which is the Gospel.

In true Biblical repentance, there will be three things to occur:

First of all, there will be conviction when sin is admitted. Man must see himself as a lost, ruined, guilty, desperately wicked sinner without hope or help, in danger of Hell. In repentance, a lost sinner not only sees himself as a sinner, but he recognizes the fact that he has sinned against a righteous and holy God. The message that Paul preached was: "**. . . repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ**" (Acts 20:21). In repentance, there will be confession of sin to God (Psalm 32:5 and Psalm 51:1-4).

Secondly, there will be contrition, where sin is abhorred. When one sees oneself as he appears before God, one is brought to a place where there is godly sorrow for one's his sin and one hates it altogether.

"For I will declare my iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin" said David in Psalm 38:18. And as Paul notes, **"For godly sorrow works repentance to salvation not to be repented of"** in 2 Corinthians 7:10.

To hate sin is to love God. In true repentance, there is not only the desire to escape the consequences of sin, but to be rid of sin itself as a thing displeasing to God.

Thirdly, there will be conversion, where a life of sin is abandoned. Repentance involves the forsaking of sin:

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” (Isaiah 55:7)

“He that covers his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy.” (Proverbs 28:13)

Repentance is not only a heart broken **for** sin, but also **from** sin. We must forsake what we would have God forgive.

It should be stressed that it is not enough just to **turn away from** sin; one must also **turn to** God for salvation. If all one does is turn away from sin without turning to God then one is simply trusting in one's own works and goodness to earn salvation, and this will only lead to condemnation. Paul said in Acts 26:18 and Acts 26:20:

“ . . . to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins . . . should repent and turn to God. . . .” (Acts 26:18; Acts 26:20)

In true repentance, there is conviction, contrition, and conversion as one turns **from** his sin **to** Christ for salvation. Salvation is deliverance of a person from his sin, not merely from a sinful environment. Jesus Christ is the Savior from not only the penalty and punishment of sin, but also the **power** of sin.

Why did Jesus come to this lowly place of sin and sorrow? Let us let Him answer this question for us in His own words: ***“ . . . I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”*** (Matthew 9:13)

The reason Jesus came to this Earth was to call sinners to repentance. Those who did not see themselves as sinners, deserving God's wrath, were not candidates for God's salvation. The sinner must reject his own righteousness, because Jesus did not come to call the righteous, not even the self-righteous. The only way a sinner will come to reject his own righteousness is by coming face to face with his own wickedness. You can take it from the lips of Jesus Himself as a settled issue that He will not call the righteous. Only those to whom it is revealed through the word of Christ that they are lost, depraved, and ungodly sinners will respond to the calling of the Savior and His Gospel plan of salvation.

All sinners are commanded to repent. As we have previously noted, Jesus soundly declared the message of repentance in His day: “. . . **repent, and believe the Gospel.**” (Mark 1:15) Repentance and faith are inseparable and occur simultaneously in a sinner's heart; you cannot have one without the other. The order as given in the Bible is repentance and faith (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21; Acts 26:20; 2 Timothy 2:25; Hebrews 6:1).

Repentance is turning from sin; and faith is turning to Christ. Repentance comes about through the convicting power of the word of God to cause a change of attitude, action, and affection.

Saving faith is trust, reliance on and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ as one's personal Lord and Savior. Saving faith is believing with your heart and acting upon that faith in obedience to His commands. It is coming to Christ, receiving Christ, looking to Christ, and calling upon Christ to save your soul on His terms. To do anything different is to reject the one and only means of salvation we have been given through the grace of God.

Yes, Jesus said you must repent and believe the Gospel, because the Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believes as we read earlier in Romans 1:16. The Gospel, the Good News for every sinner, is that Christ died on the cross for our sins, He became as our substitute, and He shed His precious blood to wash away our sins. But He did not remain dead, for He rose triumphantly from the grave on the third day in order that we might have the forgiveness of sins and have eternal life through Him. Salvation of one's soul is the most important thing in this whole, entire world.

But repentance without obedient faith is nothing more than remorse or regret. And faith without repentance makes Christ nothing more than a fire escape. There must be a work of repentance and obedient faith upon the sinner's heart before salvation can become a reality. Repentance is caused because the grace of God has given us the word of Christ, and once we hear and heed that word we will respond and act in obedient faith to have our sins washed away in that watery grave of baptism. It is then that we may cry, **"God be merciful to me a sinner"** (Luke 18:13). And He will be merciful for we have faithfully and obediently responded to the all-important question, “. . . **what must I do to be saved?**” (Acts 16:30)

The worst thing in the world for any person is to perish in their sins without Christ as their Savior and spend an eternity separated from God. Turn from yourself and sin and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ to save your soul – that is the sinner's only hope.