

# SALVATION – REPENTANCE

## “returning”

### Key question

What does it mean to truly repent?

### Key text

Acts 2:38

“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

### Key Definition

## Repentance

Repentance is the turning of one’s life (from the inside out) away from walking in spiritual darkness to walking in the light of God’s Word.

### Introduction.

1. Repentance is an important part of initial saving faith in Christ. In this context it has to do with changing one’s posture toward Jesus from disbelief to faith. But what does it have to do with one’s posture toward other sinful practices? What sins are at issue? In what sense if any is repentance a part of reconciliation? Was reconciliation completed in the Atonement or did it require human repentance as well?
2. One of the unspoken enigmas of Christian repentance is the realization that we are committed to a paradox.
  - a. One, we cannot imagine ever coming to God without confession of sin and repentance being a part of our posture.
  - b. Two, we understand true repentance to mean turning away from sin so as not to go back to it.
  - c. The problem is, if we turn away from all known sin (repent) then how can we have a need or reason to confess and repent in coming to Christ (after a few years).
  - d. The temptation is for the church to encourage Christians to be like the Pharisee who just gives thanks that he is no longer a sinner. This is only possible if we limit sin to the big stuff that we think we can control.
  - e. If we must keep confessing it must mean that we cannot or do not ever really escape sin. Can we accept this fact.

1. Perhaps the answer lies in the recognition that repentance does not mean a death blow to sinful behavior but rather that we continue to recognize sin as sin and despise it, feel shame for it, empathize with the pain caused to those who are victims of our sin and strive to be rid of it.
  2. Salvation by faith demands that it is not the degree of human repentance from sins that mark us as justified but rather our turning from the one sin of unbelief to faith in Christ. This simple faith apart from practiced purity justifies us before God. When we turn to Christ we will experience spiritual pressure to live a holy life.
3. Key texts.
- **Mk.4:17** “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
  - **Lk.24:47** “and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations,”
  - **Acts 17:30** “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent”
  - **Acts 2:38** “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”
  - **Acts 3:19** “Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away,” **3:26** “God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.”
  - **Acts 5:31** “to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.”
  - **Acts 11:18** “God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life”
  - **Acts 26:18-20** “18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.<sup>19</sup> “Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 but {kept} declaring both to those of Damascus first, and {also} at Jerusalem and {then} throughout all the region of Judea, and {even} to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.”
  - **Rom.2:4** “not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?”
  - **II Cor.7:10** “For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation”
  - **II Cor.12:21** “I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.”
  - **II Tim.2:24-26** “<sup>24</sup> And the Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, <sup>25</sup> with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup> and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.”
  - **Heb.6:1** “not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God”
  - **II Pet.3:9** “not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance”
4. A brief history of how repentance was taught in the church.
- a. From the second century until the reformation, the Catholic view prevailed – repentance (contrition, confession, penance) for post baptismal sin was necessary for

salvation. Note: Penance was a logical and practical way of identifying true repentance. How can we know if a person is sincere in their repentance? Penance by definition secures sincerity.

- b. The reformers challenged the Roman Catholic view. Calvin understood repentance to mean “a change of mind” and Luther rejected penance as a work.
- c. Five views of repentance onto salvation have been taught in the Protestant churches.

|                      | Change mind about Christ and self. | Be willing to turn from known sins at conversion. | Be willing to keep on turning from known sins. | Turn from known sins. | Keep on turning from known sins. |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|---|--|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Holiness</b>      |                                    |   |  |                       |                                  |
| <b>Arminian</b>      |                                    |   |  |                       |                                  |
| <b>Calvinistic</b>   |                                    |   |  |                       |                                  |
| <b>Lutheran</b>      |                                    |   |  |                       |                                  |
| <b>Radical grace</b> |                                    |   |  |                       |                                  |
| <b>Antinomian</b>    |                                    |   |  |                       |                                  |

**A. The Biblical terms used for repentance.**

1. In the Old Testament

- a. (**Naham**) means “to be sorry” and appears 108 times and is most often (all but 3 times) used of God’s dealings with men. **Jonah 3:9-10** “When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity”
- b. (**Shubh**) a very popular word in the OT gives the more common sense of “to turn from or toward.” The Greek words for “convert” and “return” are used to translate this Hebrew term.

2. In the New Testament

- a. (**Metanoeo**) – as a verb or a noun appears 58 times with the meaning “to change one’s mind” and to “feel remorse” for past wrong doing. It involves a change of perspective or world view.
- b. There is a process leading up to repentance.

| <b>acquisition</b>                 | <b>acknowledgment</b>    | <b>acceptance</b>                                      | <b>adjustment</b>           |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Forces that contribute to who I am | Facing honestly who I am | Separating the shame of sin from my position in Christ | Repentance and or Restraint |

- d. Repentance consists of three steps, each having an external and internal element.

|                                     |   |  |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Step #1<br/>confrontation</b>    | <b>Step #2<br/>shame</b>                | <b>Step #3<br/>walk</b>                      |
| <b>Convinced</b> in mind<br>Mk.1:15 | <b>Confession</b> of mouth<br>Matt.3:11 | <b>Conformity</b> of outer man<br>Acts 26:20 |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <p><b>Convicted in heart</b><br/>Lk.:15-17-15</p> | <p><b>Contrition of soul</b><br/>Matt.11:21; II Cor.7:10</p> | <p><b>Conversion of inner man</b><br/>Matt.3:8</p> |
|---|--|--|

**B. Repentance and the gospel message.**

1. This term is used most often of sinners who come to salvation in Christ and less often of Christians who are turning from sin in their lives. In Acts it is sometimes used as a part of the call to Israel to (turn from sinful ways) in preparation for the coming kingdom (Acts 3:26).
2. The theological challenge.
  - a. How is turning from sin to obedience, as a part of coming to saving faith in Christ, consistent with salvation by faith apart from works? The issue boils down to this – Is the repentance that leads to eternal life a repentance from doing evil to doing good (Law centered) or is it a repentance from faith in self to faith in God (God centered)?
  - b. How obedient does a person have to be in order to be considered penitent?
3. There have been three common responses to this challenge.
  - a. Repentance from sins only applies to the **will** to obey.
  - b. Repentance from sins only applies to **certain** (big) sins.
  - c. Repentance from sins of lack of faith are **distinct** from sins of lack of faithfulness.

| <b>Justification</b>   |
|--|
| Repentance from dead works (pride of self righteousness) to faith in Christ’s righteousness. |
| Turning from self (generally) to Christ  |
| Mk.1:15; Heb.6:1   |

| <b>Sanctification</b>  |
|--|
| Repentance from sinful habits to a walk that conforms to the glory of God. |
| Turning from specific sins to obedience.                                   |
| II Cor.12:21   |

4. Repentance is often a synonym for faith unto eternal life. II Pet.3:9; Lk.5:31.
  - a. Repentance is a change of mind regarding self and Christ – as a synonym for faith. Lk.18:9-14
  - b. Repentance means turning from works righteousness to faith righteousness. Heb.6:1 “not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God”
  - c. Repentance is a gift from God that is linked with the forgiveness of sins. Lk.5:31 “to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.”
  - d. Repentance is a change of mind regarding idols and God. Acts 17:29-30. Note that I Thess.1:9 gives us the same idea without using the Greek term METANOEO. “You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God”
  - e. The sin repented of in these texts is the sin of unbelief in Jesus as Savior. Other sins are not directly in view but are a part of the sanctifying process that is expected of those who are justified by faith.
  - f. Repentance that leads to eternal life is distinct from “good works” but is the basis of and for the purpose of “good works.”

**Acts 26:19-20** “<sup>19</sup> Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, <sup>20</sup> but {kept} declaring both to those of Damascus first, and {also} at Jerusalem and {then} throughout all the region of Judea, and {even} to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, **performing deeds appropriate to repentance.**”

**I Thess.1:9** “For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,”

5. Repentance is also used in contexts where sanctification of the believer is in view. II Tim.2:25, Lk.17:3-4
  - a. Repentance of a fellow brother of the covenant as in Lk.17:3-4.
  - b. Of Christians who are in sin. II Tim.2:25 “if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.”
  - c. Although the word “repentance” is not used in Lk.9:23-27, 14:26-27 (or the parallel texts in Matt.10:38-39 and Mk.8:34-38), the idea is present. In this text Jesus indicates that “coming after him will involve (1) “deny self”, (2) “take up the cross”, (3) “follow me”. The (temporal) salvation of one’s life (soul) is linked to “following after” Jesus in this way. Lk.14:26-27 makes a distinction between “coming to Jesus” and “following after Jesus.” The former is the call given by Jesus to the world. The later is the challenge given by Jesus to those who believe in him.”

**C. The pain that is a driving force in repentance.**

| <b>Pain of being a victim</b>  | <b>Pain of shame &amp; punishment</b>   | <b>Pain of empathy with others</b>   |
|--|---|--|
| Need for conviction  | Need for repentance   | Need for encouragement   |
| Abusive of others  | Destructive to self   | Connective opportunity   |
| Others centered in a destructive sense<br>“My pain comes from your treatment of me.” | Self centered in a destructive sense<br>“I am worthless and find it hard to accept myself.” | Others centered in a constructive sense<br>“I understand how I have hurt you and share your pain.” |
| These people do not change   | These people get worse  | These people get better  |

1. The psychological steps to repentance can be seen in the beatitudes. (Matt.5:3-6)
  - a. **Humility of spirit** - “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.”
  - b. **Emotional grief** - “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”
  - c. **Tenderness toward God and others** - “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.”
  - d. **Desire for righteousness** - “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”
2. Confession can reflect two different poles of sensitivity.

**Explanatory confession**

Explaining events leading up to and providing a context for the offense – childhood conditioning, temperament, circumstances.

**Empathetic confession**

Identifying with those offended – anger, disappointment, loss, etc.

|   |                    |  |
|---|--------------------|--|
| Centers on explaining the offense so as to soften the shame and guilt | <b>The offense</b> | Centers on acknowledging the damage done to others so as to share their pain |
| Empathy with offender   |                    | Empathy with offended  |
| Counterproductive to healing those offended                           |                    | Necessary to healing those offended  |

- a. Empathetic confession must come before explanatory confession.
  - b. Explanatory confession will always sound defensive to those who have been and are hurt by the offense. Those who are hurt have little initial interest in why this happened they just want to know if the offender realizes what has happened.
  - c. The Christian community has a responsibility to create an environment where it is safe for sinners to repent fully of their sins. This is done by communicating unconditional, deep love for the person and a persevering commitment to their welfare.
3. The Roman Catholic sacrament of penance consists of three elements.
- a. **Contrition** – emotional remorse for past behavior.
  - b. **Confession** – open acknowledgment of wrong doing.
  - d. **Penance** – performing prescribed acts of suffering or charity. This was a formal way of demonstrating and measuring the integrity of the confession and contrition.

Note: The Latin version of the Bible made a mistake in translating the Greek word for repentance as “doing penance.”

4. Signs of true repentance
- a. **Truthfulness and full disclosure** – This is best verified by those living with the person.
  - e. **Lack of defensiveness** – The willingness of a person to receive correction without resistance can be a sign that the person is broken.
  - c. **Changed behavior over time** – The willingness to make no provision for the flesh over an extended period of time is a basic indication of a changed life and perhaps the single best indication of true repentance.
  - d. **A willingness to be held accountable and under authority** – The lack of an independent spirit is often a sign of true repentance.

NOTE: There are many false signs of repentance – outward confession is often not enough, nor is a short-term change of behavior. It should be noted also that true repentance does not mean that a person becomes sinless or that all struggles with sin are over.

D. **The elements of repentance are illustrated in Acts 2:37-47.**

1. The instructions:
  - a. Repent
  - b. Be baptized
2. The promise:
  - a. Remission of sins
  - b. The gift of the Holy Spirit
3. The fruit:
  - a. Water Baptism

- b. Devotion to:
  - 1. The ministry of the Word
  - 2. Fellowship
  - 3. The Lord's table
  - 4. Prayer
- c. Perseverance
- d. Joyful worship
- e. Growth

## E. **Biblical examples of repentance**

### 1. **The sinning brother in Corinth.**

- a. I Cor. 5:1-13 gives us the setting of a particular sin in the church.
  - 1. The church has a responsibility to discipline unto repentance, those within its community who are living in open sin.
  - 2. The procedure could be directed along the lines of Matt.18:15-17
    - a. Private confrontation.
    - b. Private confrontation with witnesses.
    - c. Public confrontation
    - d. Public discipline
- b. II Cor. 2:5-11 warns us of the danger of not forgiving those who repent.
  - 1. It appears that Satan takes advantage of the sinner by keeping him in a shame state and of the church by keeping them in a blame state.
  - 2. It is the church's responsibility to take the initiative in extending forgiveness and comfort to the penitent sinner.
- c. II Cor.7:8-12 gives us the testimony of a penitent heart.

### 2. **King David – Ps.51**

- a. The setting for this Psalm of repentance is II Sam. 11-12 where David sins with Bathsheba.
- b. David's Psalm contains:
  - 1. A plea for forgiveness and cleansing - vs.1-2
  - 2. Confession of sin - vs.3-6
  - 3. Asking for pardon and restoration - vs.7-12
  - 4. Resolve to praise God - vs.13-17
  - 5. Prayer for the welfare of Jerusalem - vs.18-19

### 3. **Peter and Judas – Matt.26:31 - 27:10**

- a. Both Judas and Peter saw what their sin did to Jesus and wept.
- b. Only Peter persevered to see what Jesus would do with his sin and worshiped.

### 4. **Isaiah – Isaiah 6:1-8**

- a. Isaiah sees the glory of God's holiness. vs.1-4
- b. He is convicted of his own unworthiness. vs.5
- c. He experiences cleansing. vs.6-7

- d. He makes himself available for service. vs.8

#### 5. **Prodigal Son** – Lk.15:11-32

- a. The steps to repentance in the Prodigal's life
  1. Suffering - Pain as a result of sinful choices.
  2. Senses – Connecting the dots and reasoning to reality.
  3. Sonship – Remembering who you really are.
  4. Submission – Being willing to be treated like a servant in going home.
- b. Repentance led to dramatic grace from the father and also dramatic rejection by the older brother.
- c. David knew the hazards of facing an ungracious human response. II Sam.24:14 “Then David said to God, “I am in great distress. Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man.””

#### 6. **Two sons** – Matt.21:28-32

- a. This parable tells us that words without deeds are empty.
- b. The son who obeyed did so upon regretting that he had not at first been willing to serve the father.

#### 7. **Woman of sin** – Lk.7:36-50

- a. The love of the sinful woman is seen in her actions of worship and is rewarded with forgiveness.
- b. There is a direct relationship between the sense of need and the sense of grace.

#### 8. **Pharisee and Publican** – Lk.18:10-14

- a. The contrast is between two ways of seeing our neediness.
- b. Outward moral discipline can conceal the needs of our hearts.
- c. Contrition is a key to grace.

#### 9. **Confronting a sinning elder** – I Tim.5:1, 19-20

- a. Older believers are to be rebuked with special respect.
- b. Elders are to be confronted only when their sin has become public on the basis of more than one witness.
  1. In such cases the elder is to be publicly rebuked.
  2. Teachers are to be held up to special scrutiny because of their great influence over others. Jas.3:1

#### 10. **Instructions for drawing out a penitent response** – Lk.17:3; Matt.18:15-20

- a. It is expected that believers have a responsibility to confront other believers who are in need of repentance. “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.” Lk.17:3. Note that repentance in this text has to do with forgiveness between two people (not a person and God).
- b. The public exposure of the sinner was to be reserved for those who refused to respond to private rebuke. Matt.18:15-20 is an expanded explanation of Lk.17:3.
  1. In Matt.1:19 Joseph is described as a “righteous man” who did not want to “disgrace” Mary but to divorce her “secretly.”



2. In Jn.8:3-11 Jesus pardons an adulterous woman without publicly shaming her or punishing her. He then confronts those who stood in judgment of her.
11. **Responding to moral failure – Phil.3:13-14** “I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”
- a. Have the courage to look into the failure and see yourself.
    1. Two strategies for connecting in community
      - a. **Brokenness** – Life can’t be managed. The Law is given to make me humble. (The Prodigal son)
      - b. **Discipline** – Life must be successfully managed. The Law is given to make me holy. (The older brother of the Prodigal)
    2. Realize that managing life in a fallen world is an illusion.
    3. Looking in the mirror is not the challenge so much as what I choose to see when I look there.
  - b. Have the courage to look at the failure and see an opportunity.
    1. Two contrasting strategies for spiritual formation:
      - a. **Repentance** – Our response to our failures is the key to our testimony. Failure brings special opportunities for obedience. **Matt.5:3** “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
      - b. **Appearance** – Our clean outward record is the key to our testimony. Once you lose face it is over.
    2. Some virtues are most meaningful in the context of pain, suffering, and failure.
    3. We share the sufferings of Christ so as to draw close to Him as we empathize through our own shame, pain, and suffering.
  - c. Have the courage to look outside the failure and see Jesus.
    1. Two strategies for curbing sin in my life.
      - a. **Love** – Clearer vision of Jesus is what I need. Pride is my real problem. **Eph.1:18-19** “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.”
      - b. **Law** – More discipline is what I need. Lack of technique and discipline is my real problem.
    2. Acquire an image of God and myself that is powerful enough to arrest my passions for immediate gratification and motivate me to forsake all to gain Christ.

## F. **Forgiveness**

### 1. **What repentance is not:**

- a. Repentance is not primarily an **emotional** experience. It is a direction change in one’s life that starts with a change in the intellectual perception of reality.
- b. Repentance does not result in sinless **perfection**. Repentance must be repeated often and usually as a part of regular worship by even the most pious of believers.
- c. Repentance is not always or usually a **point in time** event. In many cases the change that comes with true repentance is a process that is inward and ongoing.

- d. Every **temperament or personality** type does not express repentance in the same way. Some temperaments will express themselves emotionally while others more intellectually. Some will say little and rely on actions. Others may be very open and verbose in their public confession.
- e. Repentance is not synonymous with public or private **confession**. Confession usually is a part of repentance but it is not by itself the same as the change that repentance involves.
- f. Repentance that leads to **salvation** is not the same as the daily repentance of moral failure that characterizes a disciple of Christ. The sin that must be repented of in order to become a Christian is the sin of self sufficiency, moral self-righteousness, and faithlessness (“dead works” Heb.6:1).

## 2. What forgiveness is not:

- a. **Forgetting**: deep hurts can rarely be wiped out of one’s awareness.
- b. **Reconciliation**: reconciliation takes two people, but an injured party can forgive an offender without reconciliation.
- c. **Condoning**: forgiveness does not necessarily excuse bad or hurtful behavior.
- d. **Dismissing**: forgiveness involves taking the offense seriously, and passing it off as inconsequential or insignificant.
- e. **Pardoning**: a pardon is a legal transaction that releases an offender from the consequences of an action, such as a penalty. Forgiveness is a personal transaction that releases the one offended from the offense.

## 3. The process of forgiveness:

- a. Don’t deny feelings of hurt, anger, or shame. Rather, acknowledge these feelings and commit yourself to doing something about them.
- b. Don’t just focus on the person who has harmed you, but identify the specific offensive behavior.
- c. Make a conscious decision not to seek revenge or nurse a grudge and decide instead to forgive. This conversion of the heart is a critical stage toward forgiveness.
- d. Formulate a rationale for forgiving. For example; “by forgiving I can experience inner healing and move on with my life.”
- e. Think differently about the offender. Try to see things from the offender’s perspective.
- f. Accept the pain you’ve experienced without passing it off to others, including the offender.
- g. Choose to extend goodwill and mercy toward the other; wish for the well-being of that person.
- h. Think about how it feels to be released from a burden or grudge. Be open to emotional relief. Seek meaning in the suffering you experienced.
- i. Realize the paradox of forgiveness; as you let go and forgive the offender, you are experiencing release and healing.

## 4. The extent of forgiveness:

- a. Forgiveness between man and God in Christ is radical and complete.

- b. Forgiveness between people is to be free, repeated, and unconditional. **Lk.17:4** “And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, “I repent,” forgive him.”

### **Questions that you should be able to answer.**

#### **1. Specific facts you should know.**

- a. Where do we read the most about repentance in the New Testament?
- b. What does the word repentance mean?
- c. Give three examples of repentance in the New Testament.

#### **2. Issues that you should be able to discuss.**

- a. Is it necessary to turn from specific sins in life before one can become a Christian? Why or why not?
- b. In what sense is repentance a gift of God?
- c. How should an evangelist use repentance in sharing the gospel message?
- d. Must a person submit to Jesus as master and Lord in order to be Savior?

#### **3. Questions you should wrestle with.**

- f. Why do you think John’s gospel never mention repentance?
- g. Why does Paul refer to the idea of repentance without using the term very often?