

Repentance- The Heart of the Gospel Call

I want to begin to discuss an issue which I believe is at the very heart of the gospel message today- Is repentance essential for salvation? Today the modern church has left out the doctrine of repentance in its gospel presentation. **At the heart of the gospel message is the doctrine of “biblical” repentance.** What is it and where does it fit into the gospel message? Is it an essential part of the gospel message or is it not? I hope that through this study we can look back at the witness of Scripture and consider some things that are being said by folks so that we might get a clear understanding of **what the Bible has to say about repentance.**

To be honest, one of the clearest elements of the biblical invitation to salvation is the demand for repentance. **If you just took the New Testament and read it at face value, you would conclude that repentance is an essential factor in the gospel presentation.** To reinforce that to you I would like you to do a little Bible study with me...

The Scriptures: A Message of Repentance

Take your Bibles and let's start in **Matthew chapter 3**, and we'll just follow a little bit through the gospel record into the book of Acts, a couple of notes in the epistles and see what the sum of these verses teach concerning the topic of repentance.

In **Matthew chapter 3**, we are introduced to the New Testament evangelist, none other than John the Baptist. In verse **1-2**, it says,

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

Then in verse **8**, John says,

Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance

Then in **chapter 4 verse 17**, following John the Baptist came the ministry of Jesus. What did Jesus preach?

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”

As we continue in **Matthew** look at **chapter 9** and look at **verse 13**,

But go and learn what this means: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Let's now look to the **Gospel of Mark**. In **Mark 2:17** we read,

When Jesus heard it, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Again note the message of repentance to sinners. In **Mark 6 verse 12**, we find that the ministry has gone beyond Jesus- to the Apostles, the disciples, and it says is **verse 12**,

So they went out and preached that people should repent

Luke 13 takes us deeper into the ministry of the Gospel of God, beginning at **verse 2** we read,

And Jesus answered and said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you not; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.

Now the questions being asked here, what the people wanted to know, was how was it that there were some Galileans who went in to offer sacrifice to God and Pilate’s men came in and slaughtered them while they were offering sacrifice to God. How is it that God would allow people to give their life in a bloodbath when they were doing what was right? Why did God allow that? That’s the question. And Jesus says in **verse 2**, “You think that those Galileans must have been greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered that fate. But I’m telling you they’re just an example of what’s going to happen to you if you don’t repent.

The ministry of John- “repent!” The ministry of Jesus’ “repent!” The ministry of the disciples- “repent!” Are you getting the flow here!

Let’s go to **Luke 15:7**,

I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over nine-nine just persons who need no repentance

Jesus then tells the story of the prodigal son which is about a sinner who repented and a sinner who did not repent. The sinner who repented was the prodigal. The sinner who would not repent was the brother who stayed in the house and wouldn’t recognize his own sin.

The ministry of John the Baptist was repentance. The ministry of Jesus was repentance. The ministry of the disciples was repentance. And heaven recognizes it and rejoices when one sinner...what?... repents!

As we continue in **chapter 16 of Luke**, you know the record of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man died and went to Hades and was in torment. Lazarus, the beggar, died and went into the bosom of Abraham. And of course, the rich man said, “Let me out of here so that I can warn my brothers not to come here. But Abraham said in **verse 29**,

They have Moses and the prophets: let them hear them. And he said, “No father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will... what?... repent.

Now I hope you're beginning to sense that this concept of repentance is at the very heart of the gospel invitation.

When the rich man says here, "but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent." He is saying that, "they would repent and believe the truth." That's all implied. Repentance is so obviously tied into the issue that the whole gospel response could be summed up in the world, "repent." **John preached repentance, Jesus preached repentance. The disciples preached repentance. And the sinner in Hades understood repentance.**

Now coming to the conclusion of **Luke's gospel** and really bringing it very close to home, we find Jesus summing up the gospel in **chapter 24 verse 46**:

Then He said to them, "Thus it is written and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

In other words, we are to preach what? Repentance! I hear a lot of people say they want to share their faith. I don't hear too many people say they want to go out and preach repentance. But that's really what we're called to preach- repentance for the forgiveness of sin- and proclaim it to all nations.

The History of the Church: An Affirmation of Repentance

Let's now turn our attention to the early church. Go with me now to the **book of Acts**. Did they pick up on the ministry of John and Jesus and the disciples? Did they follow the instructions of the great commission that repentance for forgiveness of sins was to be preached among all nations? Let's listen to Peter in **Acts 2:38**. Peter stands up on the day of Pentecost, this is the first sermon in the new era, the church is forming after Christ's resurrection. And what is the message that he preaches, which really is an invitation, which gives birth to the church? Peter said in **verse 38**,

Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit

"Repent...Repent!!" And he follows in the great train of John and Jesus and the disciples and follows obediently the commission of **Luke 24:47**, repent and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. And repentance, of course provides for the forgiveness of your sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In **Acts 3**, we follow further into the ministry of the early church. And here again Peter is the preacher. This is his second sermon. He says to the Jews listening to him in **verse 14** and following:

But you have denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And His name through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know, Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in

the presence of you all. Yet now brethren , I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord

Again the gospel is a call to repentance. **Chapter 11** takes us further into the expansion of the church. And we find again in **chapter 11** the Apostle Peter is still the main figure. His duty here is to report to the Jews at Jerusalem what he has seen God do in saving the Gentiles, namely Cornelius and his household. **In verse 18**, we read,

When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life

Now I hope you are beginning to get the idea that **repentance is a synonym for saving faith**, that it is the essential ingredient. Let’s go further- into the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Paul finds himself in **Acts 17** is the philosophical capital of the Hellenistic world- the city of Athens, Greece. Paul finds himself on Mars Hill. He is interacting with the philosophers of that city. He gives them this message which we have in **verse 30**,

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent

What has God commanded all men to do? Repent! Why? **Verse 31 tells us that you better repent because God has fixed a day in which He will judge the world-** He’ll judge it in righteousness- He will judge it through a man that He has appointed- a man whom He has proven to be worthy by being raised from the dead. So Paul preached repentance. Again, in **chapter 20 of Acts** Paul is instructing the Ephesian elders of the churches of Asia Minor. They were key leaders in the churches. Paul reminds them in **verse 21** that this ministry was to solemnly testify to both Jews and Greeks... **“repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Paul preached to the church leaders the matter of repentance, knowing full well that they were to preach repentance to others. We see the same thought in **chapter 26 verse 20**, where Paul is before Agrippa,

But declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.

Now beloved, that was Paul’s classic definition of gospel preaching. It is preaching repentance. **And it was because he preached repentance that they seized him-**

For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me (v. 21)

So you can see that the early church picked up on the preaching of John and picked up on the preaching of Jesus, and picked up on the preaching of the disciples, and was faithful to proclaim, as Paul did, repentance from sin and faith in God.

Paul writes in Romans 2:4,

**Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance,
and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God
leads you to repentance?**

Now mark that. The preaching of John was geared to repentance. The preaching of the Jesus was geared to repentance. The preaching of the disciples was geared to produce repentance. And even the work of God is geared to produce repentance. Why? Because it says in **2 Peter 3:9**,

**The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count
slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any
should perish, but that all should come to repentance.**

Dear friend, may I say this to you? That in this verse repentance is a synonym for salvation. There can be no believing without repentance. There can be no salvation without repentance. Repentance is a synonym- it is an element within the saving work of God that is so essential that the saving work of God can actually be called repentance.

There are other invitations in the New Testament that call for repentance without using the word. For example, Mark 8:34,

**When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also,
He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny
himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me”**

Now that is a call for turning, turning away from sin, and turning to Christ. Look at **Luke chapter 9 verse 23** where we find the same thought,

**Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me,
let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”
For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses
his life for My sake will save it**

Now that's an invitation! That's an invitation to a sinner to turn from controlling his own life to follow Christ. But you say, Are you sure that's spoken to sinners? Are you sure He's not telling an already saved person to deny himself take up his cross and be a more devoted follower? Are you sure He's not saying you might die in chastening if you don't give up your life? Are you sure He is talking to unbelievers? Well, from **verse 25** we know- He says immediately,

**For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world
And is himself destroyed or lost?**

Loses his what? His soul (**Mark 8:38**) He's talking about whether you're going to lose your soul or not, not whether you're going to lose your reward or your blessing. So this is a call to turn from a lost self-directed, self-indulgent sinful life, to follow Christ.

Now there are some who teach that Jesus is not referring to a believer but only to a disciple. The gospel Jesus proclaimed was a call to discipleship, a call to follow Him in submissive obedience, not just a plea to make a decision or pray a prayer. Jesus' message liberated people from the bondage of their sin while it confronted and condemned hypocrisy. It was an offer of eternal life and forgiveness for repentant sinners, but at the same time it was a rebuke to the outward religious people whose lives were barren of true righteousness. It put sinners on notice that they must turn from their sin and embrace God's righteousness. **True saving faith changes people. Have we heard that before?!**

In **Luke 14:26**, we read,

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sister, , and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple

What a statement! He then follows that up in **verse 27**,

And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple

There is a price to be paid- it's turning away from your sinful life. Repentance, is from the Greek word, metanoia, which means to turn, we will talk about this later. So repentance is turning from your own will, your own way, the things that you hold dear, to follow Christ at all costs. And you had better count the cost...

For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it- lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish? Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14:28-32

So follow this, "Likewise no one of you can be my disciple who doesn't give up what? All his possessions. It's a turning, it's turning from your own life, your own will, your own way, your own sin to follow Jesus at all cost. It is a change of mind. It is a change of heart. It is a new life of denying self and sin and seeing the Savior as Lord and King in place of "self". How important is repentance? Jesus said, we just read it, (**Luke 13:3, 5**), "unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

Beloved, from just that brief look at the gospels and the Acts, a verse out of Romans and 2 Peter, we can see that early preachers preached repentance. I've asked the Lord to give me

a new dose of repentance in my preaching because the subject has been greatly ignored by the modern church. Where is that kind of preaching today? Where do you hear that kind of evangelism today? It is not fashionable to preach a gospel that demands that people give up all their possessions. The gospel you hear is come to Jesus and you'll be rich. The gospel today is believe on Jesus and He'll forgive your sin and give you heaven and you don't have to worry about giving up anything. That is not what Jesus preached. Jesus preached... repent, turn from your sin and your selfishness and be saved.

Now let us address how this essential element of gospel preaching has become a thing of the past. Where did we lose it? Because it isn't around. You rarely ever hear the word in any invitation. We can go back to **1937**, to a man by the name of **Dr. Harry A. Ironside**. Dr. Ironside was a great man of God, in 1937, **he saw that the doctrine of repentance was being systematically diluted by those who wished to exclude it from the gospel message**. In 1937, **almost 80 years ago**, Dr. Ironside said something was missing from our gospel presentation. Let me quote from a book he wrote entitled, Except Ye Repent. Dr. Ironside, a champion of repentance wrote,

The doctrine of repentance is the missing note in many otherwise orthodox and fundamentally sound circles today. This is not a new battle. This is an old battle, People today are preaching a gospel that says, "Well, look, just believe, don't worry about your sin, don't worry about your past, just believe and that will all come later.

Professed preachers of grace who like the antinomians of old decry the necessity of repentance lest it seem to invalidate the freedom of grace and that was the core issue.

There were some who said if you call for repentance you're invalidating the freedom of grace and grace is so gracious and so free that you don't have to do anything but just believe. Dr. Ironside recognized in his day the dangers of what has since come to be called easy believism.

Dr. Ironside goes on to write,

Shallow preaching that does not grapple with the terrible fact of man's sinfulness and guilt, calling on all men everywhere to repent results in shallow conversions. And so we have myriads of gigtongued professors today who give no evidence of regeneration whatsoever. Orating of salvation by grace, they manifest no grace in their lives. Loudly declaring that they are justified by faith alone, they fail to remember that faith without works is dead and that justification by works before men is not to be ignored as though it were in contradiction to justification by faith before God.

Dr. Ironside in 1937 was right on target. If we go backward from there, back into church history, we also note **that the history of the church records the testimony of God's leaders regarding the essential nature of repentance**. Let me take you all the way back- back to the early church fathers around **150 AD**. Fifty years after the Apostle John died- that's early! Let me quote for you from the second epistle of Clement- **Clement was an early church father**,

Let us not merely call Him for that will not save us, for He says not everyone who says to Me Lord, Lord, will be saved, but he who does what is right. This brothers, let us acknowledge Him by our actions, in this world and in the world to come... this world, rather, and the world to come are two enemies, this one means adultery, corruption, avarice, and deceit while the other gives them up. We cannot then be friends of both. To get one we must give up the other.

This is repentance! That is exactly what James said, "Friendship with the world is enmity with God." You are either the friend of the world or the friend of God, not both... that's repentance.

Martin Luther in **1517**, fired the shot that's been heard around the world when he pinned to the church door at Wittenberg his Ninety-five Thesis. He listed 95 principles that the Roman Catholic ought to acknowledge. I don't know if you are aware of what those 95 were but let me give you the first three...

Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ is saying 'Repent ye.' This meant the whole life of the faithful to be an act of repentance.

This saying cannot be understood by the sacrament of Penance, i.e. of confession and absolution which is administered by the priesthood.

Yet, He does not mean interior repentance only, nay, interior repentance is void if it does not produce different kinds of mortification of the flesh.

One, repentance is a way of life, Two, it has nothing to do with church sacraments. Three, it's not just inward but it produces mortifications of the flesh, Martin Luther was right on target.

Let's move to the next century, **1647**. In 1647, the theological confession known as the **Westminster Shorter Catechism** was written. In this catechism there are a series of questions and answers- that is what a catechism is- question and answer, and you taught your children the catechism and eventually they memorized all the elements of theology. One of the questions in the Westminster Shorter Catechism is this,

What is repentance unto life? Answer, repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his grief and hatred of his sin turns from it unto God with the full purpose of an endeavor after new obedience. Repentance unto life doth chiefly consist of two things. One, in turning from sin and forsaking it. Two, In turning to God.

The next question is this, **What is that turning from sin which is part of true repentance?**

The turning from sin which is a part of true repentance doth consist in two things. One, in turning from all gross sins in regard of course and conversation. Two, in a turning from all other sins in regard of our heart and affections.

In other words, it is turning away from sin in what we do, and a turning from sin in what we think. The next question says, **Do such as truly repent never return again unto the practice of the same sins which they have repented of?**

Such as have truly repented of sin do never return unto the practice of it so as to live in course of sin as they did before. And where any repentance unto a course of sin, it is an evident sign that their repentance was not of the right hand. Some have truly repented of their sins although they may be overtaken and surprised by temptations so as to fall into the commission of the same sins which they have repented of, yet they do not lie in them but get up again with bitter grief bewail them and return to the Lord.

So we have the record of the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

Of all the statements that I have read on this subject, the strongest one comes from **Charles Hadden Spurgeon**. Listen to what Spurgeon wrote,

There must be a true and actual abandonment of sin and a Turning unto repentance in real act and deed in everyday life. Repentance, to be sure, must be entire. How many will say, "Sir, I will renounce this sin and the other... but there are certain darling lusts which I must keep and hold." Oh Sir, in God's name let me tell you, it is not the giving up of one sin, not 50 sins which is true repentance. It is the solemn renunciation of every sin. If thou doest harbor one of those accursed vipers in thy heart and doest give up every other, that one lust like one leak in a ship will sink the soul. Think it not sufficient to give up thy outward vices, fancy it not enough to cut off the more corrupt sins of thy life, it is all or none which God demands. Repent, says, He, and when He bids you repent of all thy sins otherwise He can never accept thy repentance as real and genuine. All sin must be given up or else you will never have Christ. All transgressions must be renounced or else the gates of heaven must be barred against you. Let us remember then that for repentance to be sincere, it must be entire repentance. It is the giving up of the whole soul to God to be His forever and ever. It is the renunciation of the sins of the heart as well as the crimes of life.

Strong enough? What Spurgeon is saying is that the teaching of the church through all its centuries is that the sinner beats on his breast and says, "God be merciful to me a sinner." He is compelled to seek deliverance from all his sin, though it's not necessary that he recite every single sin. There is a desire

in his heart to be freed from all of it. Spurgeon is saying if you come to Christ and say I want You to be my Savior and I want You to forgive me, but there is some sins I want to keep holding onto, that is, not sincere genuine repentance- it cannot save.

So we have looked at the Scripture, a message of repentance. We have looked at the history of the church, an affirmation of repentance. Beloved, in spite of all the Scripture and all the history of the church, there are some people who continue to declare that preaching repentance to be saved violates the gospel. They say that we are preaching and teaching salvation by works. But what we have seen through our study so far is that the preaching of repentance is the essential ingredient of the Gospel message itself.

For example, no less than the eminent theologian **Lewis Sperry Chafer** writes that, **“repentance is one of the more common features of human responsibility which are too often erroneously added to the one requirement of faith or belief.”** This is absolutely incredible to me! Repentance is a human responsibility erroneously added to faith? It seems to me that it’s interchangeable for saving faith in the biblical record. You say, “Well, where does that come from?” I mean, how can a person hold that view. Chafer points out in **Acts 16:31**, that Paul did not tell the Philippian jailer to repent. You know what? He’s right! You know what he said to the Philippian jailer as recorded in the Scriptures? **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”** Chafer says this concerning this verse, “Paul did not tell the Philippian jailer to repent, there is silence by Luke,” then he says, “there is an overwhelming mass of irrefutable evidence making it clear that the New Testament does not impose repentance on the unsaved as a condition of salvation.”

I find that hard to understand. What reasoning is that? You know something else Paul didn’t say to the Philippian jailer? He didn’t say Jesus died on the cross for his sin, he didn’t say that Jesus rose from the dead after three days- You want to know something? He probably said all of that including all there was to say about repentance but it was all summed up by Luke when he penned it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit just to give him that one statement, “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ...” Because “believing” implied repentance, and the “Lord Jesus Christ” implied all that He is and all that He did. But to argue from silence and cancel out every other mention of repentance in the New Testament- and to say that because it’s not there in this verse is absolutely mind boggling!

Many years ago I had a church deacon say, “Repentance does not mean to turn from sin, nor change one’s conduct.” This seems to be what many today believe about repentance. What they say is that repentance means to change your mind about who Jesus is, nothing more. Repentance is a change of mind about who Christ is, and has nothing to do with turning from sin, has nothing to do with abandoning self-rule. It is utterly devoid of the recognition of personal guilt before God. It has no element of intention to obey God. It has no element of an intention or desire for true righteousness. It is just a change of mind about who Jesus is. That is the definition I find in my Nelson Study Bible.

You say, “Well, what in the world do they do with the sayings of Jesus where He says, ‘If you want to come after me, you have to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me?’” What do they do with the words of Jesus, “You have to hate your father, your mother, your sister, brother” and so forth and so on? What do they do? They say, “Oh, all of that is directed to people that are already saved and that’s calling them to the highest level of spiritual commitment.” The problem with that is that it just doesn’t work! Because in the very same passage (**Luke 9:25**) Jesus says,

**For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world,
And is himself destroyed or lost**

Or as Matthew puts this same passage (**Matt. 16:26**),

**For what profit is it to man if he gains the whole world,
And loses his own soul?**

Lose what? Their soul! He is talking about their eternal soul. But then they have to take every one of Jesus' statements that call people to total commitment- to abandon everything to follow Him- and make those statements directed at already saved people calling them to a higher level of commitment or discipleship. **We end up with no gospel invitation in the Gospels!** In the Gospels there is no difference between a believer and a disciple. Those who change the definition of repentance say, "Yes, you repent in the fact that you change your mind about who Jesus is." It has nothing to do with turning from sin. It has nothing to do with abandoning self- rule. It has no recognition of personal guilt, no intent to obey God, and no desire for true righteousness. They are simply adding salvation to their sinful life- it doesn't work.

I submit to you that this is not what Jesus intended by repentance. **The gospel call of Jesus was a call to forsake sin as much as it was a call to believe in Him.** It was a call to turn from sin. From His first message to His last, the Savior's theme was calling sinners to turn from their sin, to embrace God, and to pursue righteousness. It was not only that they had a new perspective on who He was, but they turned from sin to follow Him. And Luke, as we noted in chapter 24:47, in quoting Jesus, said that when you go to preach, "Preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins." And if you're coming to Christ for forgiveness of sins, the thing that leads to it- what? – **Repentance.**

By the way, Luke is the only gospel writer who gives the content of the message that is inherent in the great commission. The other writers just give the command, "Go and preach." Luke says, "**This is what you preach, repentance, which leads to forgiveness of sins.**"

Let me give you a wonderful illustration of repentance. Look at **Luke 18 verse 9** and following. In Luke 18 we read of a parable which Jesus is telling to certain people who trusted in themselves for righteousness, and viewed others in contempt,

**And He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that
They were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up
to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector
the Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank
you that I am not like other men- extortioners, unjust, adulterers,
or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of
all that I possess.**

He was there confessing to God what? His righteousness. Wow, let me ask you a question? Did he believe in God? Yes. Did he have faith in God? Yes. Was he saved? No. Why? **Because his faith was devoid of what? Repentance!**

You see here a classic example of a man who believed in God but was not saved. A man who went to the temple to pray to the God he believed in but that God didn't save him. Why? Because there was no repentance in his heart, he had no relationship- so there was no salvation.

And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, God be merciful to me a sinner (v.13)

Jesus said, **“I tell you, this man (the tax collector) went down to his house justified rather than the other (the Pharisee); for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (v. 14)**

Let me now give you a quick definition of repentance. **What is biblical repentance?** Number one, it's an element within saving faith. In fact, it can be used as an expression interchangeable with saving faith. We are to preach repentance. We're to call men everywhere to repentance. That means to saving faith. It's so inherent that it can be used as a synonym for saving faith. You can call on someone and say, “Believe on the lord Jesus Christ.” Or you can call on someone and say, “Repent of your sins and embrace Christ.” You are actually saying the same thing. Repentance is simply what salvation is.

Let me make this very clear. It is not a synonym in the purest sense because it doesn't mean the same thing. It is inherent in believing and believing is inherent in repentance so that the terms can be used interchangeably but each of those terms expresses a unique element in conversion. Believing expresses- trust, confidence, faith. Repentance expresses turning from sin. As Berkoff says in his Systematic Theology, they are complementary parts of the same process toward God. Both are necessary for salvation.

Repentance, as we mentioned earlier, is from the Greek word, **metanoia**. It is made up from two other Greek words which mean “after” and “to understand.” Literally, it means an afterthought. **Metanoia**, is used in the New Testament always, now get this, always speaking of a change of purpose and it specifically always speaks of a turning from sin. The definition I have always used is this, **“Repentance is a change of mind (turning) about sin that leads to a change of behavior (a transformed life).”**

One of the helpful tools I use in studying the Greek language in Colin Brown massive work (3 volumes). In the section on conversion (Volume 1, page 358), he states this concerning repentance,

The predominately intellectual understanding of metanoia as a change of mind plays very little part in the New Testament. Rather, the decision by the whole man to turn around is stressed. It is clear that we are concerned neither with a purely outward turning, nor with a merely intellectual change of ideas.

So says the best of scholarship. In the sense that Jesus used it, repentance incorporated a repudiation of the old life and a turning to God for salvation.

Another number one source for understanding all there is to know about Greek words is what was produced by Kittel. We call it “Kittel's” - a ten volume monster dictionary which presents in an

exhausted treatment every significant word found in the Greek New Testament. This is what we read concerning the word **metanoia**.

The term demands radical conversion, demands a transformation of nature, a definitive turning from evil, a resolute turning to God in total obedience. This conversion is one for all. There can be no going back, only advance and responsible movement along the way now taken. It effects the whole man. First, and basically, the center of personal life, then logically his conduct at all times, in all situations, his thoughts, words, and acts. The whole proclamation of Jesus is a proclamation of unconditional turning to God, not merely that which is downright evil but that which in a given case makes total turning to God possible.

That's how they understand it from the technical side, the meaning of the word. This use seems to be supported from Scripture. In **I Thessalonians 1:9**, we read,

For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how your turned from idols to serve the living and true God.

In this verse we have the elements of repentance chronicled for us. Paul reminds the Thessalonians how they turned from idols to serve the living true God. Paul gives us **three elements of repentance. One- turning to God. Two- turning from evil. Three- serving the true and living God.** This is a beautiful summary of biblical repentance. Now listen to me, **no change of mind who Jesus is can save until those elements are present- turning from sin to God to serve Him. Repentance is an element within saving faith.**

Repentance also according to this verse involves a redirection of the will. Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines **metanoia** as,

The change of mind of those who have begun to abhor their errors and misdeeds and have determined to enter upon a better course of life, so that it embraces both a recognition of sin and sorrow for it and hearty amendment, the tokens and effects of which are good deeds.

In other words, it's redirection of the will that results in a changed behavior. It's not merely sorrow for sin, although genuine repentance has sorrow. It is a redirection of the human will. It is a choice to forsake all unrighteousness and pursue holiness.

I have been accused of preaching that repentance is a pre-salvation work and until you clean up your life and repent you cannot get saved. No, repentance is not a pre-salvation attempt to get your life cleaned up. It is not an invitation to turn your back on evil so Christ will accept you. It is an element of saving faith that redirects the will.

J. I. Packer in his helpful book, **Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God** writes,

**The repentance that Christ requires of His people consists
in the settled refusal to set limits to the claims which He may make
in their lives**

It is not mental activity. **There is an intellectual aspect.** Repentance involves recognition of sin, recognition of the sinfulness of sin, and recognition that sin is an affront to a holy God. It involves the intellectual recognition that I am personally responsible for my sins and my guilt. It includes the recognition that Christ died for my sins that He, as God, wants to rule my life, that's the intellectual part of repentance. Many times in our gospel presentation we tell people that they must first recognize that they are a sinner- and this is true. But recognizing that you are a sinner is not repentance- it is the first step of repentance.

Secondly, **there is the emotional part.** That recognition produces sorrow, it produces new desires and new impulses, it produces shame. **2 Corinthians 7:10**, says **there is a sorrow that leads to repentance.** As it starts out, you see that your sin is an affront to God- you see you are guilty before a holy God. You see what Christ has provided intellectually, Then it touches your emotions and there's a brokenness and a sorrow and a shame and a guilt that pours out of that sorrow.

The last element of repentance is volitional. Repentance moves the will and brings a change of direction, a new determination to abandon disobedience and surrender your life to Christ. Then it produces a change of behavior. Where there is no change of behavior there is no change of the will- there is no repentance. It may have been intellectual, and emotional but if there is no turning from sin there is no repentance- there is no salvation. **When repentance is genuine it directs the will.**

When all three elements of repentance come together the result is life changing. When the will is activated there is a change of direction. That is why John the Baptist said, **"Bear fruits worthy of repentance"** (**Matt. 3:8**). You say you have repented- let's see your life. Demonstrate it. Real repentance alters the character of a person. You will have fruits worthy of repentance.

One of my favorite authors is Martin Lloyd-Jones. One of the books that blesses me that he wrote has to do with the Sermon of the Mount. In it he writes,

Repentance means that you realize that you are a guilty vile sinner in the presence of God, that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that you are hell-bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called sin is in you and that you long to get rid of it and that you turn your back on it in every shape and form. You renounce the world whatever the cost, the world in its mind and outlook as well as its practices, and you deny yourself and take up your cross and go after Christ. Your nearest and dearest friend may call you a fool or say you have religious mania, you may have to suffer financially, but it makes no difference, that is repentance.

Repentance becomes an ongoing way of life. The repentance that begins at salvation starts a progressive life-long process of confession of sin (**I John 1:9**). The active continuous attitude of repentance produces the poverty of the spirit, the mourning, the meekness that characterizes true believers in the **Beatitudes of Matthew 5**. Repentance produces a new way of life. Those who hear Jesus preach knew exactly what He was calling for, believe me. The Jews knew exactly what He was calling for. He wasn't asking them just to change their position about who He was. They knew what Isaiah meant when he preached. What did he preach?

Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes, Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Isaiah 1:16-18)

Look at 2 Chronicles 7:14,

If My people who are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land

Isaiah 55:6-7

Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon

What are the fruits of repentance that John the Baptist spoke of in Matthew 3:8? Simply righteous deeds, holy deeds, godly deeds- to put it simply- **a transformed life!**

True repentance appears in the very fiber of everyday living. In the character of our lives. That's where genuine repentance will appear. And, I firmly believe, that any message that doesn't press for repentance cannot be called the gospel. Conversion to Jesus is more than a break with the old thought pattern- it is new life.

Again in Kittel's volume concerning conversion we read,

To be converted embraces all that the dawn of God's kingdom demands of man- a changed life

Let me conclude with one last passage, **Matthew 21:28**,

A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, Son, go, work today in my vineyard, He answered and said, I will

not, but he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second one and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir, but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said to Him, the first, Jesus said to them, Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom God before you.

Wow, Jesus describes two kinds of people. People who pretend to be obedient but are actually rebels in their hearts- and people who begin as rebels but do what? Repent! He told it for the benefit of the Pharisees who pretended to be obedient to God but were rebels in their hearts. And then there were the harlots and the tax collectors who started out as rebels but repented.

There is no salvation apart from repentance

As a pastor in these modern times, I have been very burdened to present clear, scriptural teachings to my congregation. This topic is important - I would even say CRITICAL - because a correct understanding of the clear teaching of scripture on SALVATION is of the highest importance to all men. Christ sent us with His message to reach the lost. We need to present the scriptural gospel – not our version of the gospel – to all who ask a reason for the hope we have (I Pet. 3:15). The most important thing for us to do is point people to the message of the cross – and the Lord Jesus. He has told us what to do and what to say. Let's be sure we share HIS message and trust in Him for the outcome as people come to Christ.