

## “REAL REPENTANCE”

There is a word that has just about disappeared from the modern pulpit. I mean, you rarely hear it spoken, and if it is perchance mentioned, it is not with any real sense of urgency or importance. It's not the word *love*. No, we hear that word a lot today. Many of us may not do a lot about it when we hear it, like we ought to, but there's not much of a shortage on the use of the word *love*. I'm also not talking about the word *forgiveness*. While some preachers don't put a lot of emphasis on the need for God's forgiveness, we do hear a lot about the need to forgive others, or even forgiving ourselves. I'm not talking about the word *peace* either. Again, while the emphasis may not be on obtaining peace with God, as it should be, we do hear plenty about peace with one another and peace with ourselves and so on. I'm not even talking about the word *service*. We aren't told as much as we should be about service to God, but we do hear a lot about service in our churches and our communities. It's also not the words *joy*, *happiness*, or *hope*. None of those are really forgotten words in the pulpits of our time. The word that I'm talking about is actually used in the Bible about 1,000 times, but you could probably hear 1,000 sermons in America today, and not hear the word but a handful of times. Jesus used the word unequivocally in **Luke 13:1-5**:

**“There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”**

In this passage, Jesus took a current event and taught a timeless truth with it. A couple of catastrophes had taken place, and people were talking about it in the town squares and in the streets. There were some Galileans who were put to death by Pilate, and there was this group that Jesus mentions, who were killed when a tower collapsed on them. I don't know why the tower fell, or how all of that happened, but it did. And it had people saying, “Well, these people must have committed some terrible sin for God to let those things happen to them!” Well, that's the way a lot of people look at tragedies even in modern times. But, Jesus said that those people who died weren't any worse sinners than the people to whom He was speaking. He told them if they didn't repent, they would perish, too. You see, Jesus didn't come telling people to be happy with themselves as they were; He said to *repent*. If you really understand what the gospel is all about, it is a blessed opportunity given by grace and mercy, and it is a serious call to repent.

What is repentance? What does it mean to repent? Have you repented? Today, we're going to “Let the Bible Speak” about repentance, as we search the scriptures to see what they say about the mandate of repentance, the meaning of repentance, the motive of repentance and the measure of repentance.

## I. The MANDATE of Repentance

As I said, the word *repentance* may not be heard in many sermons today, but had you lived in the days of the prophets of Israel, John the Baptist, Jesus our Lord or His apostles, you would've heard it frequently, because it was a major theme of their preaching. If I were to ask you, what did Jesus preach, what would you say? Did Jesus preach on love? Absolutely, He did. Did He preach on mercy, understanding and compassion? Yes, He taught on all of those things. We hear a lot today about how tolerant and accepting Jesus supposedly was. We hear about how forgiving Jesus was. But do you know what His very first AND last sermons were? The answer might surprise you. Both sermons were about the same thing. That is very interesting to me. If you let me hear the first sermon that a man preaches, and then the last sermon that he preaches, and he's still preaching the same thing, I'll have a pretty clear idea of what kind of preacher he is, and what he's about. Well, what then was Jesus' first sermon? It wasn't the "Sermon on the Mount." His first sermon is found one chapter prior, in **Matthew 4:17**:

**"From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

That was the very first sermon that Jesus ever preached. So, what was Jesus' last sermon? Don't say "The Great Commission," because that wasn't it. His last sermon was actually to the church at Laodicea, in the book of Revelation, recorded in **Revelation 3:19** as follows:

**"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent."**

So, you see, Jesus began His preaching by telling people to repent, and He finished preaching by telling people to repent. That tells me that repentance, in the eyes of Jesus, must be very, very important. So, first of all, we have what we'll call the MANDATE of repentance. When Jesus sent His band of twelve disciples out, and He gave them what we call the limited commission, the record says, in **Mark 6:12**:

**"And they went out, and preached that men should repent."**

That's what they went around the countryside preaching. Then, after Jesus died, resurrected and went back to Heaven, the gospel in its fullness was preached for the first time in **Acts 2**. When the sinners asked Peter what to do to be saved, Peter told them in **Acts 2:38**:

**"...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins."**

Peter later preached the following:

**Acts 3:19 "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."**

Paul preached to the idolatrous Athenians, saying this:

**Acts 17:30 "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent:"**

Peter would also say the following:

**2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”**

When Jesus wrote to the seven churches throughout Asia Minor, most of them received the same message from Jesus, and that was the message of repentance. So, repentance is not just important—it is an essential requirement of the gospel. It is a mandate. Don’t listen to the lie that this present culture tells about the Lord Jesus. Yes, Jesus preached love, but He also preached repentance. Make no mistake about it. Anybody who preaches one without the other (love without repentance or vice versa) is preaching a false gospel. God demands repentance, and He has never, ever offered to save anybody who refused to repent. The compassionate Christ gave the woman caught in adultery a second chance. That was mercy. That was grace. But He also told her in **John 8:11:**

**“...Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.”**

So, you see, that’s a mandate for repentance. Every sinner who would be forgiven by God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, must come to God in humble, broken repentance.

## II. The MEANING of Repentance

What is repentance? There are a lot of false notions about repentance today. Some people think they have repented of their sins when they really haven’t. If I were to ask you to give me a simple definition of repentance, what would it be? Would you say that it means to be sorry for your sin? Or to confess your sin? Or to be convicted of your sin? Well, all of those things are related. And as important as those things are, none of them are actually the Bible definition of repentance. There are several examples in the Bible, of people who were caught in their sin. They were, in some way, sorry for the mess that their sin had made of things, and many of them even confessed their sin, but they certainly didn’t repent of it. Remember in **Exodus 9**, how that God was sending one plague after another on Egypt, to get Pharaoh to let His people go, and God sent that frightening storm of hail upon the land. The Bible paints an ominous picture of how it thundered and lightning struck and hail covered the country. Now, that must have been an awfully frightening thing to see, and it unnerved Pharaoh so much that he called for Moses and Aaron in **Exodus 9:27** and he said to them,

**“...I have sinned this time: the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked.”**

Well, that sounds good, doesn’t it? Here’s a man who just fesses up to his sin and wickedness. Here’s a confession from a man who was frightened and afraid of what God was doing to him. But was that repentance? No, because if you look at **Exodus 9:34**, when Moses spread out his arms and the storm ceased, this is what happened:

**“And when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants.”**

Now, I know a lot of people who become scared when they go to the doctor and get a terrible report, or when they have that heart scare, or when all kinds of bad things seem to happen to them. Oh, they might be scared enough to cry out to God, but that’s not necessarily repentance.

So, repentance is not just being sorry. It’s not just acknowledging or confessing sin. The meaning of repentance is to change. To change what? Your mind. Your will. W.E. Vine defines repentance as it is used in **Luke 13:3** and other similar places to mean: to change one’s mind or purpose. The mind, or the heart, is the seat of one’s intellect. And if you change a man’s mind, and you change his heart and his will, then you’re going to change his behavior. That’s what repentance is. It is a revolution or change of heart that brings about a change of life. So, if I repent of my sin, I not only acknowledge and am sorry for it, but I also make up my mind to stop doing that thing. I’m going to completely change direction. Repentance is really a two-sided proposition. Let me show you what I mean. In **Acts 20:20-21**, Paul is talking to the elders at Ephesus and he says,

**“And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

You see, turning toward God in repentance means turning toward Jesus Christ in obedient faith. Why do we have to turn toward Christ? Why do we have to turn toward God? Because in our sin, we are headed away from Christ. That’s where sin puts us. But repentance is a revolution of mind. It is a change of direction and a resolve to reform, and that produces a change in behavior. The fact is, God demands that change in every one of us if we would be saved and please Him. We hear a lot about Christ’s forgiveness, but do we hear about His call to repentance? Will God forgive the drunkard? Absolutely! God wants to forgive the drunkard, but not until the drunkard gives up his alcohol. Will God forgive the liar? Sure! Will God forgive the thief? Sure, but he has to stop cheating. He has to stop stealing. Will the Lord forgive the homosexual or the sexually immoral? Sure! Does God love the homosexual, the adulterer, the fornicator? Yes, He absolutely loves them! But He doesn’t love their behavior. And He doesn’t forgive until they stop committing the sin.

One of the best examples of Biblical repentance that I immediately think of is that of the prodigal son. Jesus told the parable of that rebellious young man who had turned against his father and left home and lived in sin. Jesus said that he went to his father one day, determined to have things his way and to live for himself and sin. He went off to the far country where he thought nobody would tell him what to do or how to live. He greedily snatched his inheritance from his father’s hand, as it were, leaving home with a spring in his step, and he went straight to the far country, where Jesus says that he wasted it all on sinful and riotous living. Really, in a sense, that is a picture of all of us. Well, this young man lost his money and his friends. They weren’t the friends he thought they were. Finally, he lowered himself to a hard and smelly job that was absolutely filthy in the eyes of the Jews: feeding swine. He was hungry,

tired, lonely and depressed. Now, there is no doubt that he was sorry for his sin, but that wasn't repentance. Repentance was when he was standing in the muddy pigpen and he said to himself,

**Luke 15:18-20 "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father..."**

You see, what makes *that* repentance is the words, "I will arise...I will go...I will say...Make me...And he arose...And he came to his father..." Those are the words that indicate repentance. There was a complete 180\* of will and direction, whereas he once left home and walked away from his father, now he wasn't merely regretting his decision; he was coming home and now walking towards his father. That's repentance.

What did Paul say about the sinful past of the people who made up the church at Corinth?

**I Corinthians 6:9-11 "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."**

You see, they had repented. They no longer did those things. That's the meaning of repentance.

### III. The MOTIVE of Repentance

Where does repentance come from? What causes a person to repent? It's not a miracle or a special direct or abstract operation of the Holy Spirit. The Bible does say that God grants repentance unto life (**Acts 11:18**), and that means that God provides the time and opportunity, He opens the door for one to see the truth and repent. The sword of the Spirit, the word of truth, is meant to prick our hearts and convict us of our sin, and thus effect repentance. There are some things which result from hearing the Word of God that can drive us to repentance. One of those things is godly sorrow. Now, as I already said, sorrow itself is NOT repentance. Seeing the mess that sin made and regretting it or being sorry that you've been caught—that's NOT repentance. In **Joshua 7**, Achan took the spoils of Jericho that God had said not to take and that caused God to place a curse upon Israel so that they lost the next time they went into battle against Ai. God told Joshua that the problem was that there was sin inside the camp, so Joshua launched an investigation and the evidence pointed to Achan. Now, Achan didn't want to be caught, but he had no choice but to confess what he had done.

**Joshua 7:20 "And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done:"**

You see, he said the same thing that Pharaoh said. The same thing that Saul said, when he sinned in **1 Samuel 15:24**, “**I have sinned...**” But none of those men truly repented, and in Achan’s case, Joshua said, “Why hast thou troubled us? The Lord shall trouble thee this day...” (**Joshua 7:25**). And Achan and his family were put to death.

No, you see, repentance is the result of being sorry enough that you decide to change. The church at Corinth was wrapped up in some pretty bad things—so bad that Paul wrote them a letter giving them quite a whipping. After they had read Paul’s letter they were sorry enough that they changed. So, Paul wrote them a second letter acknowledging their repentance.

**2 Corinthians 7:9** “**Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner...**”

**2 Corinthians 7:10** “**For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation...**”

So, sorrow is NOT repentance, but godly sorrow is the MOTIVE that brings about repentance or change. Hearing God’s Word is what produces conviction of sin in our hearts, and that conviction produces a sorrow for the sin that we’ve committed, and that sorrow motivates and leads us to turn our wills toward God in repentance, thus placing our faith in Christ and obeying Him in order to receive that forgiveness. Repentance is produced by a genuine realization and a spirit of humble brokenness over our sin.

#### IV. The MEASURE of Repentance

How do I know if I have repented? How can I measure the genuineness of repentance, and know that it has taken place? Do I just *feel* like I have repented? Is there some sign that I receive that I have repented? No, you see, I make up my mind to change, I repent, then something takes place as a result, that tells me and others, that I have repented of my sin. Well, what IS that?

When John the Baptist told the lost people of his day to repent and prepare for the coming of the kingdom, he told them the following:

**Matthew 3:8** “**Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance...**”

In other words, there IS a way to measure repentance, and that is, by the fruit that it bears. What is that fruit? A changed heart. A changed life. You no longer do those things that you used to that are wrong. Your whole attitude towards those things is now different. You’ve changed direction. You’re no longer living for self and for sin, but are now living for Christ the Savior.

So, let me ask you today: Have you repented of your sin? Have you TRULY repented?

Are you a sinner, never having obeyed the gospel? Well, you need to repent. You need to do something about it.

Are you living in sin and immorality? Friend, you need to give up that bottle, or that man/woman, that illicit lifestyle.

Are you a member of an unscriptural church? Well, as hard as it may be, you need to leave that church and get into the one that Jesus built. Is your worship wrong, and without scriptural authority? You need to give up what you can't read about in God's Word, and start worshipping in spirit and in truth.

Remember what Jesus said in **Luke 13:3**:

**"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."**