

## Salvation—Sanctification (17<sup>th</sup>)

(Today we continue studying the *experimental* aspect of sanctification in the life of the believer as he lives on earth. Today's podcast deals with the topics of repentance and conversion.)

In our study of salvation, it is likely that the topics of repentance and conversion should have been considered before now; however, it is not our intention in these podcasts to follow a systematic theology or seek to develop some kind of religious system. Since we have been reviewing somewhat the matter of sanctification, it seems proper to include repentance and conversion with it. Often writers and preachers combine these two subjects together and treat them as being the same thing. While there are times when it is difficult (to say the least) to distinguish them, I believe it can safely be affirmed that they are not identical. Also, we do not plan to try to give a thorough study of these subjects but only review them in connection with sanctification as found in the New Testament. Obviously, if we would endeavor to include all of the Scriptures in this study we would find that both the Old and New Testaments would not only agree but that the contents would go beyond the scope of the purposes of these podcasts. Since sanctification is not only a setting apart for special use but also includes holiness, I believe it is safe to say that repentance and conversion fall under this classification. Additionally, it is not our purposes to discuss different aspects of repentance (and/or conversion) as to such views as “genuine” vs. “false” repentance, “repentance to salvation” vs. a sorrow or repentance that “worketh death” (II Corinthians 7:10), or other features. Our major concern is that under the category of sanctification God's children are brought to repentance and are converted in this life. It is also admitted that as sometimes it is difficult to determine the distinction of “repentance and faith” it is the same with “repentance and conversion.” There are times (I believe) when both may happen at the same time, but still there is a difference to be made as to what takes place. For example, Paul was not only struck down and regenerated on the road to Damascus, he also repented and was converted in his life from a hater of Christ and His people to a believer in Christ and love for the people of God and the gospel.

It cannot be denied that repentance was at the center of the New Testament gospel because John the Baptist and Christ began their ministry preaching repentance (Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17). Christ commissioned the apostles likewise to preach repentance (Mark 6:7-12). When those on the Day of Pentecost cried out, “what shall we do?” Peter said that they should repent, Acts 2:37-38. Paul began his ministry preaching repentance (Acts 26:20) and when testifying to “certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics” and to the Areopagus, the highest court in Athens, he told them that God commands “all men every where to repent,” Acts 17:17-31. And prior to ascending back to heaven our Lord said “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem,” Luke 24:47. The last messages that the Lord gave to congregations included the command to repent, Revelation 2:5, 16, 21-22; 3:3, 19. In fact, repentance was stressed to five of the seven congregations in Asia. I believe that repentance is an essential part of the gospel, but in today's society we hardly hear any sermon of repentance. Yes, there are sermons about repentance but how many sermons have you heard where the audience was called on to repent? Are we so sanctified that there is no reason to repent? I think not. I am fearful that modern Christianity has become infected with the world system that the idea that anyone needs to repent is foreign to the thinking of the average person. Conversely, when anyone does call on someone to repent of a sin or sins, he is often attacked and ridiculed as being someone who is legalistic, narrow minded, or out of place and has no business interfering with the life of another person.

The Greek words for repent and repentance are the verb μετανοέω (metanoéō, *met-an-o-eh'-o*) and the noun (which is derived from the verb) μετάνοια (metánoia, *met-an'-oy-ah*) and while there may be other words associated with these two, we will limit ourselves to these two. The two Greek words under consideration for convert and conversion are ἐπιστρέφω (epistréphō, *ep-ee-stref'-o*) and ἐπιστροφή

(*epistrophḗ, ep-is-trof-ay'*). Though there are synonyms that are spelled differently that mean the same thing, it seems to be obvious that since two distinct words and meanings are used by God in His Holy Scriptures, He expects us to know that He would not have us to believe they are identical and that a distinction is to be understood between the two topics of conversion and repentance. A large study could be given to the use and meaning of these Greek words as found in the New Testament, but that would expand our purposes of these podcasts. The basic meaning of repentance is *a change based on sorrow, remorse, or regret for sin*, and the basic meaning of conversion is *a change that may or may not be caused by guilt or compunction*. In fact, Strong's definition as supplied by the computer Bible program *SwordSearcher* defines repent "to think differently or afterwards, i.e. reconsider (morally, feel compunction)," and convert is defined simply as "to revert (literally, figuratively or morally)." While much larger and lengthy definitions may be supplied from a theological perspective, at the risk of being too simplistic, we will consider repentance as being a change of direction based on pain and regret for sin while conversion is simply a change of direction. Either way, from a Christian viewpoint, I believe we will find that both are a result of the inward working of the Holy Spirit within a born again individual.

Peter and the apostles preaching before the high council at Jerusalem said, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand *to be* a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and *so is* also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him" Acts 5:30-32. Obviously, many things can be said concerning these verses, but we will limit our remarks to the phrase "to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Of this J. C. Philpot, the English Strict Baptist in England, said, "The two go together. Whenever he gives repentance, he gives remission; wherever he grants remission, he bestows repentance. It will not do to let repentance go. Every child of God is brought to repent of his sins, and by repentance to forsake them." (*SwordSearcher*, in loco. Taken from Philpot's sermons.) The comments of John Gill regarding "for to give repentance to Israel" are equally worthy of note: "to the Israel whom God has chosen for himself, and Christ has redeemed by his blood, and whom the Spirit calls by his grace: these being sinners, as well as others, stand in need of repentance; and whereas this is not in any man's power, but is the free gift of God's grace; for though he should give men time and space to repent, and afford them the means of it, yet if he does not give them grace to repent, they never will, such is the hardness of man's heart; Christ is appointed to give this grace to the chosen ones, which he does by sending his Spirit to convince of sin, and to take away the stony heart, and give an heart of flesh." While there are some things wherein I may differ from Calvin regarding his comments on this verse, his overall observations are worth noting. They are as follows:

Furthermore, we have declared before what the word *repentance* doth signify, to wit, that it is an inward turning of man unto God, which showeth itself afterwards by external works. For Christ giveth us the Spirit of regeneration for this cause, that he may renew us inwardly; to the end that a new life may afterward follow the newness of the mind and heart. And if it belong to Christ to give repentance, then it followeth that it is not a thing which is in man's power. And surely, seeing that it is a certain wonderful reformation, (or fashioning again,) which maketh us new creatures, repaireth in us the image of God, bringeth us out of the bondage of sin unto the obedience of righteousness; it is a thing as impossible for men to convert themselves as to create themselves. Repentance is, I grant, a voluntary conversion, but whence have we this will, save only because God changeth our heart, that it may be made fleshy of a stony heart; flexible, of hard and stubborn; and, finally, righteous of wicked, (Ezekiel 11:19.) And this cometh to pass when Christ regenerateth thus by his Spirit. Neither is this given in a moment, but it must be increased daily during our whole life, until we be fully joined to God; which shall be then when we have put off our flesh.

Though Calvin referenced Ezekiel 11:19 in his comments, allow me to quote it with verse twenty: “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”

The comments of the *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary* regarding Acts 5:31, are also of note. Concerning the phrase “to give” they state, “dispensing as a ‘Prince.’” Commenting on the statement “repentance and remission of sins” — “as a ‘Saviour’; ‘repentance’ embracing all that change which issues in the faith which secures ‘forgiveness’ (compare Acts 2:38; 20:21). How gloriously is Christ here exhibited; not, as in other places, as the *Medium*, but as the *Dispenser* of all spiritual blessings!” Again we see that repentance is not an option left to the will of an individual, but that the regenerated child of grace is brought to repentance by the operation of the Holy Spirit under the preaching of the gospel.

The Lord willing, we will have more to say about this in future podcasts, but our time is up for today. Farewell.