

UNCONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS
Scripture: Matthew 3:1-9

INTRO: Our subject has been that of unconditional forgiveness. This doctrine greatly affects another doctrine, so let me introduce you to one of the hardest, but most wonderful subjects in all the Bible. It is the subject of repentance. If forgiveness is one of the most misunderstood doctrines of Scripture, as pastor Gary Inrig has said; repentance, on the other hand, is one of the most neglected in the modern church, in my opinion.

Some years ago my wife and I attended some Sutera Twins meetings held on behalf of their ministry in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. There a man came to sit beside us and we were introduced to Peter Dugalescu. Peter Dugalescu was a pastor who was instrumental in the big changes that took place in Romania a number of years ago. When he grew up in Romania, Christians in Romania were called, "The Repenters." There is no danger of North Americans Christians being labeled like that.

In many years of Christian ministry I have come across this subject again and again. I have come to understand that my own understanding of it was largely affected by the shallowness of the 20th century Church in which I was saved. In the Christianity in which I grew up, accepting Christ was maximized and repentance was minimized, and often even left out. And now in my later years, and especially because I am in ministry I wrestled with many things related to it. And yet, as difficult as repentance is, I now have come to call this word one of the most wonderful words in all the Bible. I cannot describe how wonderful repentance is, because only with it, comes true forgiveness; true cleansing of the soul.

Now to repent, on the other hand, that is not so wonderful. It is one of the hardest things required to become a Christian. It is one of the hardest things required to grow spiritually. If ever pride will rear its ugly head, it is here. And the devil will provide every excuse necessary to keep us from it. Many, many so called Christians are going to go to hell because they have not repented. Many others are kept drinking spiritual milk because they refuse to deal with some sins.

The wonderful thing about repentance is that every one of us, as sinners, can find forgiveness for our sins by truly repenting. Think of this: even a small sin cannot be paid for by a whole life of good works nor any amount of money. And yet, on the

basis of true repentance, even such sins as murder and adultery can be washed away. And all of us as Christians can grow spiritually by repenting when we do wrong.

But the huge danger we face is our own pride. We will not repent or we will substitute something for repentance in order to feel better, but mostly we will refuse to repent. And when we do not repent, we will excuse others who don't repent, or do what I call 'slop bucket repentance' or 'bubble gum repentance.' Here is an example of slop bucket repentance. I have wronged my wife and then I take her out to dinner. That is slop bucket repentance. No amount of dinners can satisfy sin. They may pacify, but they never cleanse. Here's another example: If I have done anything wrong... Or, I did this but...

The teaching of unconditional forgiveness in most cases avoids or nullifies the teaching of repentance. Today it is taught by numerous evangelical preachers that repentance is not even necessary. For example, a book on repentance, written by Michael Pearl came into my hands some years ago. I want you to listen to this quote on page 33, "There is absolutely no scriptural basis for telling a sinner to 'repent of his sins' in order to be saved. To do so is to preach 'another gospel'" (Pg. 33). Many preachers have concluded that because the word to repent does not occur in the Gospel of John, which most believe was a Gospel written to the Church, means that repentance is not necessary in the Church age.

Some time ago I read an article from Compass International titled, "Is Repentance Necessary For Salvation?" It said, "The 'repentance in salvation' question is hotly debated between the dispensationalists and covenant theologians. The idea of 'salvation without repentance' understandably sends many into fits of rage?"

Later they say, "When the word repent was used in the Gospels, speaking to the Jews under the law (i.e. Mark 2:17; Acts 3:19) who had rejected Jesus as the Messiah, the word used was the verb "metanoe" ... they needed to think differently/reconsider what they thought about who Jesus was. The same is true in 1 Thessalonians 1:9 when they had to change their previous conception about God and turn from idolatry. But in, for instance, 2 Cor 7:10, a different Greek word was used, the verb "metanoe" -- and used interchangeably with "believe." They "changed their mind" about trusting self, good works or tradition and instead trusted the "finished" work of Jesus on the cross", end quote. Now let me just say, you can read things

like this and think they know what they are talking about because they use Greek words to prove what they say. But the Greek words used here are both misspelled, and they say the repentance was about what they were trusting in and not about sin. I find no ground for that.

But listen now, how the article continues, "Nowhere in the Bible are "believe" and "repent" used together to teach two different requirements for salvation", end quote. There are two major errors in that statement. For example, Mark 1:15 uses both, and by no stretch of the imagination can one say that the word to believe, and the word to repent in that passage do not teach two different requirements.

But they say all that to say this, "Therefore, when salvation from the sinful state is in view, 'repent' (a change of mind) and 'believe' (a change of what you're trusting) are in essence used as synonyms" end quote. I don't want to spend more time on that. That is very, very wrong in my estimation. I gave you that to show you what is happening in evangelicalism in order to do away with repentance in salvation.

V. THE TWOFOLD REQUIREMENT FOR FORGIVENESS

A. Repentance

1. Definition of repentance

Now it is essential then that we define repentance. The original word in the NT is *metanoia*. It comes, as I have often told you, from two words. First is the preposition, *meta*, which here means 'a change' and the other word is *noia*, which is from the word 'nous' of which I have also often told you. It speaks of the data storage part of the mind. So, it literally means a change of mind. That is, we have something stored in our mind that is wrong or untrue and we learn that we are wrong and we change our mind.

And I ask you, what is man's main problem? I hear people and even preachers say many times that there is only one sin that will keep you out of heaven and that is unbelief. There may be some truth to that, but unbelief is not the primary cause why we are lost. We are lost primarily because of sin. Unbelief keeps us locked in our sin. And according to Christ, the way of

salvation is first repentance and then faith (Mark 1:15).

2. Biblical Evidence for the need to repent

We want to now consider the biblical evidence for the necessity of repentance, and though this doctrine is taught in the OT as well as the NT we will consider here the NT evidence for the sake of time, and because some consider OT teachings on such matters as irrelevant.

The word to repent occurs 28 times in Matthew through Luke. It does not occur in the book of John and some have erroneously concluded that repentance is not necessary today because John's Gospel, which was written to the Church, does not include it. We will see later that this is not the case.

But let us turn to Matthew 3 (read 1-2 and 4:17). These passages set the tone for the preaching and teaching of Christ in the Gospels. But go now to Luke 24. Jesus has been resurrected and shortly He will ascend to heaven and this is what He said (read 46-47). Repentance should be preached to all nations. Repentance from sin is a condition of salvation throughout all ages!

Now, since repentance is not mentioned in the Gospel of John, let me just add a point here. Faith and believing are mentioned over and over in John's Gospel. And faith and repentance are two doctrines included in the one doctrine of conversion. Where true repentance is in view, so is true faith; and where true faith is in view, so is true repentance.

Then in Acts 2, the Church was born. The Apostle Peter preached the very first message ever preached in the Church. So look at 2:37-38 (read). The Church was born with the requirement of repentance. And note, though faith is not mentioned in this passage, we do not conclude from that, that faith is not necessary. It is included.

Now, let me just show from the book of Acts alone that repentance is necessary after the OT, or in the Church

age. I am simply going to read a number of verses to show this:

Acts 3:19 "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,

Acts 5:31 "Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

Acts 8:22 "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.

Acts 11:18 When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."

Acts 17:30 "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,

Acts 20:21 "testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 26:20 "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.

Well, repentance is mentioned 22 more times in the NT. Surely we cannot conclude that repentance is not necessary in the Gospel age, the age of grace as we sometimes call it. And repentance is always about sin.

3. Requirement of repentance

Now, in light of the subject of this series of messages, the lack of teaching on repentance has dropped man's level of the fear of God to a very huge extent. We are willing to admit that North American Christianity is an inch deep and a mile wide, but who wants to put his finger on the real causes? And here is the question; is repentance a requirement for

salvation? I might go further and ask, is it a requirement for ongoing salvation? Let us say a Christian has given himself to adultery, can he or she be saved apart from repentance? That is a very important question.

Well, here is what Michael Pearl said, "There is absolutely no scriptural basis for telling a sinner to 'repent of his sins' in order to be saved. To do so is to preach '*another gospel*'" (Pg. 33). And here is what the Compass International article said, "Nowhere in the Bible are "believe" and "repent" used together to teach two different requirements for salvation." And again, "Therefore, when salvation from the sinful state is in view, 'repent' (a change of mind) and 'believe' (a change of what you're trusting) are in essence used as synonyms."

And so, to begin with, when Jesus began to preach the 'Gospel' here is what Mark 1:14-15 says, "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." Here, repent and believe are used together in one passage by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and both are part of the 'Gospel'.

And consider the difference in the two words. To repent is 'metanoia' and to believe is 'pisteuo'. These two words are totally unrelated as to their root words and as to what is in view in each.

Then in Acts 20:21 it says of the Apostle Paul, "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Now note, that not only are the words different, the place they are directed is different. It is repentance towards God. Why? Because, ultimately all sin is against Him. And it is faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Because He ultimately died to save us.

4. What brings about repentance

Now, let me ask, what makes repentance necessary? It is sin. And what brings about biblical repentance? It

is conviction of sin. And I believe conviction sets in through the conscience, and this ultimately brings us to repentance. There is in man a conscience. The NT word is *suneideisis*. It means a co-knowledge, a knowledge alongside our knowledge. It is there in all men, unless they have killed it by denying to deal with things for too long. John 1:9 says that Jesus was the true light, and that He lights every man coming into the world. This is a difficult verse, but I believe it speaks of the conscience.

Now the conscience sensors our thoughts, words and actions. And when it says, "Guilty" the alarm bells in us go off. The conscience is probably one of the greatest proofs of God there is. The conscience can torment us almost to the death. And when the conscience goes to work and it goes to work hard enough, it will bring about sorrow of soul. And when the sorrow of soul gets big enough, we begin to consider repentance.

Now go to 2 Corinthians 7. The Apostle Paul had written a very stern letter to the Church about a man who needed to repent of a very serious sin and the church had not exercised church discipline. After Paul strongly admonished them, they obeyed him and dealt with the man, and he consequently confessed his sin and dealt with the matter at hand.

And in 2 Corinthians 7, Paul writes to them about that and we'll read verses 8-10 (read in KJV). I am going to read it from the KJV and correct some of the translation as we go because it is somewhat misleading. It says, "8 For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, (the word here is *metamellomai* and would better be translated as *regret*. It is not the word for repent. So he is saying, "I do not regret it) though I did repent (again it is *metamellomai* and means rather, 'though I did regret it'): for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. 9 Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance (this is the true word for repentance, *metanoia*): for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. 10 For godly sorrow worketh repentance (*metanoia*) to salvation not to be repented of

(metamelomai, regretted): but the sorrow of the world worketh death."

So, here we find that godly sorrow, the conviction that comes from the Holy Spirit through the conscience brings about repentance. And sometimes this conviction must become very, very strong before we repent, or change our minds.

Jesus said in John 16:8, "And when He (the Holy Spirit) has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment." When conviction comes to the heart, or the mind, it causes pain of mind and makes the soul sorrowful. This is produced by the Holy Spirit, because He is holy. Now when conviction is experienced in the mind, and it comes from the Holy Spirit, that means there is something wrong in the soul, there is some sin somewhere.

Now let me say a word about guilt. The Greek word for guilt is *enochos*. It means literally "to have in or hold in." When our conscience siren goes off, it puts us behind the bars of guilt and it seeks to hold us there until we are ready to deal with sin. I believe God "holds us in" or keeps us in the prison of guilt through our conscience.

So, go with me to John 8 (read 1-6). Jesus was busy writing something on the ground, and when they continued asking, we come to verse 7-8 (read). Now, what was He writing? Could it be that He wrote the ten commandments on the ground? Whatever it was, the Holy Spirit spoke through those words to every heart present.

Now look at verse 9 (read). What happened? They were all convicted. To be convicted is to be declared guilty. And where does this conviction take place? In the conscience. And what is the conscience? The original word is *suneideesis*. I would translate it as a 'with knowledge'. It is a knowledge alongside my own knowledge. It is a knowledge that says, "You are wrong. You are guilty." And when Holy Spirit convicts us through our conscience we become guilty before God and we know it. Now, what happened in this case, each one left, being convicted by their own conscience. And they left, beginning with the eldest.

So, here is the progression so far in John 8. A bunch of religious people, bound in their religiosity, found ground to test Jesus with a person who had clearly violated the law of God. And to test Jesus they brought her to Jesus. Jesus, using the law of God or some such truth, brought the light of God to bear on their hearts and exposed them. The Holy Spirit used this truth to use their consciences to convict them, or convince them of their own sin. When they were convinced by their own consciences of their own wrong, they became guilty before God.

So, Romans 3:19 says, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." That, I believe is what had happened here. So, we must ask, what is guilt? The original NT word for guilt is *enochos*. It means literally "to have in" or "to hold in." When the Holy Spirit, using the Word of God, convicts us of sin, He puts us in hold where we are charged as being guilty. And I believe He "holds us in" through our conscience. The result is the next point. This guilt comes as a feeling of condemnation. This is most graphically described for us in Matthew 18:21-35.

So, what is the process from when we sin, until we are behind bars in our conscience? First, is our sin. Then the Lord reveals that sin to us in some way through His Word. Then the Holy Spirit convicts us through our conscience and puts us in the jail cell of guilt. This jail cell is the condemnation of the conscience about our sin, and here we are held in.

Now, what happens when we come under conviction? We try to get away from that which brings this pain of mind and soul, just like we pull our finger away from something hot that hurts us. And so, with the woman brought to Jesus, after each one was convicted, instead of dealing with the sin each one had, they left. Oh, how wonderful to get away from a place of conviction. Why? Because guilt and conviction ask for painful surgery. It is the surgery of repentance and confession. Oh, how horribly painful that is! And where is the pain most powerfully felt? In our pride! We will do absolutely anything to protect our pride. Anything.

We will not repent. We refuse to repent. We hate to repent. Repentance is the cross, and oh, what a cross. We will compromise in almost any way to avoid full and actual repentance.

5. True and false repentance

Let us look briefly at another point and that is true repentance as opposed to false repentance. Here is the clearest evidence of true repentance. Someone has sinned and the Holy Spirit has gone to work and brought about conviction. The person has struggled through this matter and come to the conclusion that he needs to deal with it. And so he goes to the one he has wronged and fully acknowledges the wrong, naming it and confessing it, and then asks for forgiveness. True repentance cleanses both the wronged person and the wrongdoer. The wronged person feels fully vindicated, and the wrongdoer goes away rejoicing and cleansed.

Now there are some who come under conviction and even come to where they are willing to talk about it but they have excuses or they say, "If I have wronged you anywhere..." That is all you need to know that you do not have true repentance. Here is someone trying to get away with as little as possible. When they are not willing to name their sins, it is not true repentance.

Another sign of false repentance is when a person has wronged another in front of others, or it has affected others, and they are not willing to clear it up there as well. That is false repentance. It has not gone deep enough yet. When repentance has gone deep enough, one is willing to do whatever it takes to clean it up. Another sign of false repentance is if a person makes excuse or argues about his or her rights. Zachias was willing to restore those he had cheated by giving back four times as much as he had taken. That is repentance.

Now, there are two different motivations for repentance. The first is when the Holy Spirit works through the conscience and a person takes care of wrong without being reminded by someone else. The second is when someone has to be approached about their sin before they deal with it. It is this second

kind that is very hard to deal with. It is usually hard to tell if it is real. S. M. Davis has said, "True repentance with a heart that turns towards God is never too late. Late repentance is seldom true." And I might add that it is often hard to tell if the repentance is real if someone who has to be rebuked for his sin before he deals with it. In such cases, the rebuked person may just want to get the case off of his or her back.

What complicates things even further is if this same person keeps doing the same thing. When there is true repentance, no number of times is too many, but now it becomes much more difficult. For a wife or husband who is being cheated on, there may have to come a time of probation. I think when repentance is real, it is seldom hard to recognize; and when it is hard to recognize, it is possibly not real.

In 2 Corinthians 7, the passage we looked at earlier, the KJV had translated two different words by the one English word to repent. The word 'metamelomai' would be better translated to regret. When we regret being caught or regret the consequences our sin has brought, and we deal with it out of regret, that is not true repentance. True repentance acknowledges sin and is willing to confess and forsake it.

In the Corinthian passage we looked at earlier, the KJV had translated two different words as repentance. The word 'metamelomia', I think, speaks of regret. Regret is not repentance. A full change of mind, metanoia, that is repentance. And a full change of mind will most certainly bring a change of behavior. Without that, true repentance has not taken place.

6. Fruits of repentance

Let us go back for a last Scripture once more to Matthew 3 (read 1-9). It is necessary for us to talk a little about the fruit of repentance. Some time ago, I pondered this passage. If John had been some modern evangelist he would have gone home with some great stories of conversions among religious leaders. But John was not in this work for his own glory. He wanted truth. And I wondered, did John baptize these Scribes and Pharisees? Now notice he calls them a brood of

vipers! Would he have baptized them? I don't think he did. They were fleeing the wrath to come of which they had been persuaded by this great preacher, but there was no fruit of repentance in their lives.

Now let me raise another question: Is it right to ask for fruits of repentance before receiving such people as candidates of the baptism of repentance? Well, repentance is what it was all about! And I ask, what fruit was John looking for? How could he baptize some, because he was certain they had repented, and not others because the fruit was not there? Certainly, by fruits of repentance we would think of a changed life. How did John know some had a changed life and these Scribes and Pharisees did not? He did not have time to observe all their lives before he baptized those who were coming to him.

Look at Acts 26:19-20 (read). Here we find three steps. 1 repent, 2 turn to God, 3 do works that fit repentance. But notice now that the works fitting repentance are works that follow after salvation. Those are the works of a Christian. So here is the picture: The person repents of sin, turns to God in faith, and then lives a godly life, works worthy of repentance. Now it is instructive that the verb to do these works is present tense. They are ongoing works.

But those coming to John for baptism were just at the repenting stage. In Matthew 3:8, what was John asking for when he wanted to see fruits of repentance? Was he asking for those fruits that follow becoming a Christian, or the fruit that attends becoming a Christian? Furthermore, how did John know that some had the right fruit and others did not? Had he observed all their lives for some time and he knew? That is not possible. So how did he know who was truly repentant and who was not?

Well, it is most instructive that the verb 'to bear fruit' is not in the present tense, as in Acts 26:20. It is an aorist. The aorist is often translated by the English past tense. And the book, 'The New Linguistic and Exegetical key to the Greek New Testament' says that the aorist imperative here speaks of a specific act. Now what fruit resulting from repentance is a specific act and worthy to be baptized upon? What

fruit could John the Baptist recognize in those who came to him for baptism? What was this specific act?

Ellicott says, "The English version is ambiguous and not happy, suggesting the thought of the 'fruit' as preparing the way to the way for repentance. The thought is, however, 'by coming to the baptism you profess repentance; bring forth, therefore, fruit worthy of repentance - i.e., of a changed heart and will", end quote. And what fruit would have made it evident to John the Baptist that some were ready for baptism and not others?

Let me ask, could it be several months of good works? Those who got saved when the Church was born were baptized in the same day they came to Christ. They did not have time to bear a lot of good fruit first. What fruit is worthy of repentance and recognizable in one day? How did John know these Scribes and Pharisees were not truly repentant? How did he know who was and who was not? Would he now follow them around for a month or two to watch and then they could come and be baptized? Well, I want to answer that question in the next message and it will be the content of our next message.

CONCL: And so, to conclude, we have been looking at the fifth point of these messages on unconditional forgiveness and this point I called 'the twofold requirement for forgiveness'. The first of those is repentance. It is no true Christianity that says repentance is not necessary in the present dispensation. Repentance is one of the weakest links in modern Christianity in my estimation. To repent is to change one's mind, which must result in a changed life as we have seen. We have also seen that the view that repentance is no longer necessary is unbiblical. It is as necessary as it has ever been. It is both necessary for initial salvation and for ongoing salvation.

We saw that it is conviction of sin that brings about repentance and it is the Holy Spirit, working through the Word of God that accomplishes this. The Holy Spirit puts us in the prison of guilt until we are willing to repent and deal with sin. Many times we talk ourselves out of dealing with sin, but true release comes only upon true repentance. There is a great difference between regretting sin, and its consequences and changing one's mind about it.

Last, we saw that John the Baptist required the fruit of repentance before he baptized those who came to him. It will give us the second requirement in this point I have called 'the twofold requirement of forgiveness' and Lord willing, we will look at it in the next message.