

Biblical Repentance

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Saving Faith

BIBLICAL REPENTANCE

- Biblical repentance as preached by John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the apostles, is A CHANGE OF MIND TOWARD GOD AND SIN THAT *RESULTS IN* A CHANGE OF LIFE. IT IS A SPIRIT-WROUGHT CHANGE OF MIND THAT LEADS TO A CHANGE OF LIFE.
- It is not a change of life. That would be a works salvation.
- It is a radical, Spirit-wrought change of mind toward sin and God, such a dramatic change of mind that it changes one's actions.
- Note the following summary of Paul's message: "But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that THEY SHOULD REPENT AND TURN TO GOD, AND DO WORKS MEET FOR REPENTANCE" (Acts 26:20).
- The gospel message preached by Peter on the day of Pentecost and by Paul after Pentecost required repentance and defined that as a mindset to turn to God from evil works.
- Paul summarized His gospel message as "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).
- The gospel requires that the sinner exercise repentance toward God and faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- Biblical repentance is a change of mind toward God and sin that results in a change of life. To say that it has nothing to do with one's attitude toward sin is to throw away the Bible and nineteen centuries of Bible-believing preaching.

REPENTANCE WAS PREACHED BY BIBLE PREACHERS

Repentance was preached by John the Baptist

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Matthew 3:1-10).

Repentance was preached by Jesus Christ

"From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

"But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matthew 9:13).

"Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes" (Matthew 11:20-21).

"And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, 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” (Luke 13:2-5).

“I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. ... Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:7, 10).

“And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved 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 among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46-48).

Christ’s goal in dealing with men was not merely to lead them in a sinner’s prayer, but to bring them to repentance and genuine salvation. He described salvation in terms of coming to repentance.

Repentance was preached by Christ’s Disciples

“And they went out, and preached that men should repent” (Mark 6:12).

Repentance was preached by Peter

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).

“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” (Acts 3:19).

“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” (Acts 5:31).

“Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:22-23).

Repentance was preached by Paul

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30).

“And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed 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” (Acts 20:20-21).

“But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:20).

The Bible says that God is “longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). There is no Bible example of people being saved who did not evidence a change in their lives. The Apostle Paul, reviewing his ministry before King Agrippa, noted that he went about preaching to Jews and Gentiles “that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:20). This is exactly the message we are to preach today.

WHAT BIBLICAL REPENTANCE IS NOT

REPENTANCE IS NOT MERE HUMAN REFORMATION

Men have the ability to reform their own lives in some sense. It is not uncommon for men who have gotten into trouble to come to their senses and to change their ways. Drunkards have stopped drinking; wife beaters have ceased from their violence; thieves have become honest citizens; harlots have turned from a life of infamy. This in itself is not biblical repentance.

First of all, reformation is man-centered and this-world-centered; whereas repentance is God-centered and eternity-centered. The man who merely reforms has his eyes on the people he has offended and the consequences of his actions in his present life. The gospel, on the other hand, calls for “repentance toward God...” (Acts 20:21). The Prodigal Son’s repentance was demonstrated by his change of attitude toward God as well as toward his father. “I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I HAVE SINNED AGAINST HEAVEN, and before thee” (Luke 15:18).

Furthermore, reformation is problem-centered, whereas repentance is sin-centered. The man who reforms his life looks upon his actions as problems and faults, but not as wicked sin against a holy God. Those who repent, on the other hand, confess that they have SINNED against God. They do not soft-peddle their sin. This is why it is crucial that people be taught plainly what sin is from the Bible. To tell people that they have sinned is not enough, because the sinner does not naturally think of himself as truly evil. He will admit that he has faults, problems, weaknesses, lack of self-esteem, etc., but this is not the same as admitting that he is a wicked and undone sinner before God.

REPENTANCE IS NOT PENANCE

Many Catholic Bibles translate “repentance” as “do penance,” according to Catholic theology that replaces biblical repentance with a sacramental duty. Penance is a Catholic sacrament whereby sins “done after baptism” are absolved by the priest upon the confession and good deeds of the penitent. The four parts of penance are confession, contrition, absolution, and satisfaction. The satisfaction refers to various duties prescribed by the priest, such as praying the Rosary. Satisfaction is defined by the authoritative Addis and Arnold *Catholic Dictionary* as “a payment of the temporal punishment due to sin through works which are good and penal and are imposed by the confessor.”

This is not biblical repentance. Sinners are not commanded to go to priests for forgiveness. They are not told to confess their sins to a priest or to do good works with the hope that their sins will thereby be forgiven. All of the elements of Catholic penance are unscriptural.

REPENTANCE IS NOT MERE REMORSE FOR WRONG ACTIONS

The Bible tells us that men can be remorseful about their actions without exercising genuine repentance unto salvation. This is described as the “sorrow of the world” in 2 Cor. 7:10. There are key examples of this in the Old and the New Testaments. King Saul is the prime Old Testament example. He was sorry that he got caught in various sinful acts, but he did not demonstrate repentance because his actions did not change (1 Sam. 15:24; 24:17; 26:21). Judas is the fearful New Testament example of a man who was remorseful but did not repent toward God (Matt. 27:3-4). Like reformation, remorse is man-centered rather than God-centered. Those who repent change their mind about their relationship with God and this results in a change in the way they live. Judas regretted his actions, but he did not turn to God.

REPENTANCE IS NOT MERE CONFESSION OF OR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SIN

Repentance is also not mere acknowledgement of sin. Pharaoh did this, but he did not repent toward God and his actions did not change (Exodus 9:27). While working in a county jail ministry for several years, I saw many men and women who acknowledged that they had sinned, but most of those did not exercise repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

REPENTANCE IS NOT MERELY CHANGING FROM UNBELIEF TO BELIEF

Biblical repentance as preached by John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Apostles, involved a change of mind TOWARD GOD AND SIN. Note the following summary of Paul's gospel message: "But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and DO WORKS MEET FOR REPENTANCE" (Acts 26:20). The gospel message preached by Peter on the day of Pentecost and by Paul after Pentecost required repentance and defined that as a turning to God from evil works. Biblical repentance is a change of mind toward God and sin that results in a change of life. To say that it has nothing to do with one's attitude toward sin is to throw away 19 centuries of Christian preaching.

REPENTANCE IS NOT MERE CHANGING ONE'S MIND

The historic definition of repentance, as it applies to salvation, is a change of mind toward God and sin that results in a change of life. Repentance is not turning from all sin in the sense of some sort of sinless perfection; it is a change of mind toward sin so that the sinner no longer intends to walk in rebellion against God. The Thessalonians turned from the sin of idolatry (1 Thess. 1:9). That does not mean they thought that their works had a part in their salvation. The fact that God requires that we turn from sin does not mean that salvation is by works. We know that the works are *the fruit of* genuine salvation, not *the cause of* it. Repentance, defined as turning to God from sin, is not a works salvation. It is the sinner's obedient response to the Holy Spirit's conviction (John 16:8).

REPENTANCE IS NOT MERELY THE SAME AS BELIEVING

If repentance and faith are the same, why does the Bible make such a plain distinction between them? "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). In reality, repentance and faith are two different actions though they are intimately connected and cannot necessarily be separated in time. Repentance is acknowledging one's sin and rebellion against God and changing one's mind about sinning against God. Faith is trusting the finished work of Christ for forgiveness. Repentance and faith are the two aspects of man's response to God's offer of salvation.

If repentance and faith are the same, why did all of the New Testament preachers proclaim repentance? Many arguments have been given to justify not preaching repentance, but the bottom line is that the Bible preachers proclaimed repentance. If repentance is totally wrapped up in believing, why did the Lord Jesus Christ preach "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3)? Why did Peter preach, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted" (Acts 3:19)? Why did Paul preach, "God ... now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30)? Or, "[men] should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:20)?

If repentance and faith are the same, why did the Lord Jesus Christ say that repentance is a part of the Great Commission? "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). The answer is that repentance is to be preached, and faith is to be preached. While these doctrines are intimately connected, they are not the same. Biblical salvation involves both: "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). That is what the Lord's Apostles preached, and they are our only infallible guides. Those who claim that repentance does not have to be preached or that it is exactly the same as faith are denying the plain teaching of the Word of God.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF REPENTANCE

1. *Repentance is the Prodigal Son coming to himself, confessing his sin against God and his father, and returning home.* “And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 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. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (Lk. 15:17-20).

2. *Repentance is the Thessalonians turning to God from idols to serve the living and true God.* “For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9).

3. *Repentance is Zacchaeus turning from corruption to uprightness.* “And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham” (Lk. 19:8,9).

4. *Repentance is Nebuchadnezzar humbling himself before God.* “Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase” (Dan. 4:37).

5. *Repentance is the Philippian Jailer running from his sin to Jesus Christ and becoming a kind helper of Christians.* “And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house” (Acts 16:33-34).

6. *Repentance is the Christ-rejecting Jews at Pentecost turning to Christ and His church.* “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. ... Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:38-42).

7. *Repentance is a sinner raising the white flag of surrender to God.* Repentance is a sinner who is at enmity with God laying down his arms, raising the white flag of surrender, and submitting to the One against whom he was before in rebellion.

8. *Repentance is a U-Turn.* Repentance is when a sinner is heading one direction, which is the way of sin and self-will, and he stops and turns around so that he is now going God's way. This definition of repentance is seen in Exodus 13:17: “Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt.” The repentance of the Jews would mean they turned around from following God to return to Egypt. This is the opposite of what a sinner does for salvation, but it gives the correct definition of the term repentance.

9. *Repentance is an assassin laying down the knife.* “The hand that clutches the assassin's knife must open 'ere it can grasp the gift its intended victim proffers; and opening that hand, though a single act, has a double aspect and purpose. Accepting the gift implies a turning from the crime the heart was bent on, and it was the gift itself that worked the change. Faith is the open hand, relatively to the gift; repentance is the same hand, relatively, not only to the gift but more especially to the dagger that is flung from it” (James Stewart, *Evangelism*, pp. 48,49).

10. *Repentance is the thief returning the stolen property.* “I believe we ought to make right what we can make right. What if I was staying with a group of preachers and one of them stole my wallet while I was sleeping? The

next day he comes up to me and tells me he is terribly sorry and asks me to forgive him. I would be glad to hear that he is sorry for stealing my wallet, but I would certainly want and expect more than that from a repentant thief. I would want my wallet back! I don't believe he has really repented unless he brings my billfold back. I DON'T BELIEVE YOU HAVE REPENTED UNTIL YOU GET RIGHT AND SAY, 'LORD, I'M GOING TO LIVE DIFFERENT FROM NOW ON,' AND BY THE GRACE OF GOD YOU WILL LIVE DIFFERENT" (Lester Roloff, *Repent or Perish*).

SAVING FAITH

- As we saw in the first lesson, Paul preached repentance toward God and faith toward Jesus Christ. The sinner must repent toward God, because it is God that he has offended by his self-will and disobedience. The sinner must put his faith in Jesus, because He died for our sins.

Consider three important questions about saving faith:

WHAT IS SAVING FAITH?

- It is important to understand that saving faith is not simply believing some historical fact with one's mind. For example, we believe that George Washington was the first president of the United States and that Hitler ruled Germany in World War II and that Mahatma Gandhi lived in India. But such beliefs do not change the lives of those who believe. Likewise, many people believe that Jesus Christ lived long ago and that He did many wonderful things, but this belief does not change their lives. Saving faith is different from this.

Saving faith is an undivided faith.

The Bible says that Jesus is the only Lord and Saviour. See John 14:6; Acts 4:12. To be saved I must believe that Jesus Christ ALONE is Lord and Saviour, just as the Bible says. Some people try to add Jesus to their other gods. They want to believe in Jesus while believing in other lords as well. No one can be saved this way.

Saving faith is a trusting faith.

The word "believe" in the Bible means to trust, to depend upon, to commit oneself to. To be saved a person must fully trust his soul and eternal destiny to the Lord Jesus. He must rely upon Jesus and Jesus alone to forgive his sin and make him right with God and carry him to heaven.

Trusting Jesus is like trusting a boat to carry me across a lake. It is not enough to look at the boat and to admire it. You must actually get into the boat and trust it to carry you safely to the other side. Have you trusted Jesus to take away your sin? Some people say they believe in Jesus, but they continue to go through their old religious rituals. This proves they are not truly trusting in Jesus. When we trust Jesus, we realize that we do not need any vain religious rituals for salvation.

Saving faith is a convinced faith.

To be saved I must be fully convinced that Jesus is Lord and Saviour and that He will fulfill His promises to me. True salvation is a know-so salvation. This is the kind of faith that Jesus' early disciples had. See Peter's testimony in John 6:66-69. This is the testimony of a genuinely saved person. We can be sure because of God's promises (1 John 5:11-13). In contrast is the "faith" of those who say they "hope" they will be saved, meaning they aren't sure. I once met a Nepali who said he had 99% faith in Jesus. That isn't enough!

Saving faith is an unmixed faith.

Saving faith cannot be mixed with human works. See Romans 3:24; 4:4-5; 6:23; 11:6; Ephesians 2:8-9. A person must receive Christ's salvation as a free gift, not as a reward for good works. A gift is something that someone else purchases and then gives to me freely. If I try to pay anything whatsoever, it is no longer a gift. Jesus is the one who purchased our salvation at great cost with His death and the blood. Are you enjoying God's free salvation in Jesus Christ today, or are you still trying to do something to earn your salvation?

Saving faith is a receiving faith.

Saving faith receives Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Saving faith doesn't merely believe in Jesus as a historical person; it calls out to Him and asks Him for salvation. See Matthew 11:28-29; John 1:11-12; and Romans 10:13. Salvation is a personal relationship with Christ.

WHAT IS THE PLACE OF WORKS IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE?

Does believing in Christ mean that I don't have to do any works in the Christian life? What is the place of works?

Again we will look at Ephesians 2:8-9, but this time we will examine verse 10, as well.

God wants us to live obedient, holy lives, but this comes after salvation. Good works are the product and fruit of salvation, not the way of salvation. Good works are produced in the believer by the Holy Spirit.

In the epistle of Ephesians, there are nearly 90 commandments that the believer is to obey. These include being humble (Eph. 4:1), longsuffering (Eph. 4:1), putting away lying (Eph. 4:25), putting away anger (Eph. 4:26), not stealing (Eph. 4:28), not speaking any corrupt thing (Eph. 4:29), being kind (Eph. 4:32), forgiving (Eph. 4:32), putting away fornication and uncleanness (Eph. 5:3), having no fellowship with the works of darkness (Eph. 5:11), redeeming the time (Eph. 5:16), understanding God's will (Eph. 5:17), not being drunk (Eph. 5:18), being filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18), wives submitting to their husbands (Eph. 5:22), husbands loving their wives (Eph. 5:25), children obeying their parents (Eph. 6:1-3), fathers training their children and not provoking them to wrath (Eph. 6:4), servants being obedient to their masters (Eph. 6:5), and masters treating their servants justly (Eph. 6:9).

These are some of the works that God wants the believer to obey, but we cannot do these things until first we are saved. We must be reconciled to God through Jesus, forgiven of our sins, and indwelt with the Holy Spirit. Only then can we serve God acceptably.

IS SALVATION A RELIGIOUS PROCESS?

A popular heresy today is the teaching that salvation is a process, but the Bible says it is a miraculous conversion experience. This was what Jesus taught. See Matthew 18:3 and John 3:3.

The new birth conversion is not a long process; it is a supernatural, life-changing event! And this happens when the sinner repents of his sin and puts his faith in Jesus as his only Saviour.

Coming to repentance and faith can be a process, but salvation itself is a birth and a conversion experience. This is what we see in the Bible. Those who were saved in the book of Acts were saved on the very day they received Christ. This includes the Jews who believed on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:36-39), Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:44-48), Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), and the Philippian jailer and his household (Acts 16:30-34).