

REPENTANCE

“Repent, for the kingdom
of heaven is at hand.”

- Jesus -

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Matthew 4:17

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Why talk about Repentance? Many people think repentance is largely an Old Testament practice and no longer required of New Testament believers. Others see repentance only used as a means to condemn, not as a means to reconcile people to God. Repentance is largely misunderstood in the church today, and largely neglected. It is not hard to find video curriculum on being missional, evangelistic, community driven, gospel centered, or discipleship oriented. However, do a search for curriculum on repentance and holiness and you will likely come up empty. My personal studies have revealed that this was not always so. Many of the puritan writers between the 1500s and 1800s had much to say on this subject. Some examples include, “The Mortification of Sin” by John Owen, “The Doctrine of Repentance” by Thomas Watson, “The Evil of Evils” by Jeremiah Burrows, and “The Religious Affections” by Jonathan Edwards... Furthermore, my personal sin has exposed my need for repentance as a believer. I am confronted with sin regularly, even daily. I find that I need to put sin to death regularly. Martin Luther, igniting the reformation in 1517 by posting his 95 theses on the church doors at Wittenberg, wrote as his first thesis, “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘*Repent*’ (Mat 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” Repentance is a daily practice for a Christian. And lastly, repentance brings joy to the believer. Just as Paul said “I die daily” in light of the resurrection, the Christian must put sin to death daily in order to experience the joy of the new life God has given him or her.

But what do the scriptures have to say? What does the New Testament have to say about Repentance? Jesus very first words of public ministry, after being tested in the wilderness, were “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Mat 4:17). If Jesus first words of public ministry were about repentance, what were his last words? The last words of Jesus recorded in our Bible are found in red letters in the book of Revelation... to the churches. Jesus said,

- ❖ To Ephesus, “I have this against you, that you abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; *repent*, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you *repent*.” (Rev 2:4-5)
- ❖ To Pergamum, “You have some there who... put a stumbling block before the [people], that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality... Therefore *repent*.” (Rev 2:16)

- ❖ To Thyatira, "I gave her time to *repent*, but she refuses to *repent* of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works." (Rev 2:21-22)
- ❖ To Sardis, "I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. *Wake up*, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of God." (Rev 3:1-2)
- ❖ To Laodicea, "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and *repent*." (Rev 3:15, 19)

And what did Apostles of Jesus preach?

- ❖ Acts 2:38, Peter said, "*Repent* and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."
- ❖ Acts 3:19-20, Peter addresses the people, "*Repent* therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord..."
- ❖ Acts 8:22, Peter said, "*Repent*, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that... the intent of your heart may be forgiven you."
- ❖ Acts 17:30, Paul addresses the men of Athens, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to *repent*."
- ❖ Acts 26:20, Paul declares, "that they should *repent*... and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance."

Do we realize a necessary component of the Good News... is Repentance? This battle is nothing new. Jonathan Edwards fought this same battle several hundred years ago as he wrote, in *The Religious Affections*, that some "instead of embracing Christ as their Savior *from* sin, trust in him as the Savior *of* their sins... so that they may sin against him with good courage, and without any fear. They trust in Christ to preserve to them the quiet enjoyment of their sins, and to be their shield to defend them from God's displeasure; while they come close to him, even to his bosom, the place of his children... to fight against him..." How can we be a Christian if we choose to remain in our sin? What is the point of salvation... if we are not to be delivered from sin?

How does Repentance come about? Partly *by word*. While Peter was preaching repentance in Acts, we read "when they *heard* this, they were pricked in their heart" (Acts 2:37). We must allow God's word, through another individual, to reach our heart. But do we live in a generation that is willing to listen to anyone else speak on behalf of God to our heart? Yet God has used mankind to preach his word from the beginning. Secondly, repentance comes *by the Spirit*. Jesus said, "When the Holy Spirit comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgement" (John 16:8). Have we ever tried producing repentance without God's Spirit? Good luck! We can reason and struggle for hours, days, years... Yet without the Holy Spirit convicting the heart, there is no word eloquent enough to transform the heart. We must realize that repentance is given to us by God's grace (Acts 5:31, Acts 11:18). God's grace does not stand alone, but acts as the mother of all virtues that come to us by the Holy Spirit, including repentance. Thomas Watson, in the *Doctrine of Repentance*, tells us that "Repentance is a grace of God's Spirit..." Do we see repentance as a gift? Often, we see repentance as a sacrifice, a duty, and a sterile act of obedience. In God's eyes repentance is a gift, an opportunity, resulting in a changed relationship with him. God is after our heart. He always has been and always will be. He is not trying to hurt us... but to help us. He is not picketing against us... But rooting for us. This is the "repentance that leads to life." (Acts 11:18).

What are the Ingredients of Repentance? Thomas Watson, in *The Doctrine of Repentance*, wrote

“Repentance is a spiritual medicine made up of six special ingredients:

1. Sight of Sin
2. Sorrow for sin
3. Confession of sin
4. Shame for sin
5. Hatred for sin
6. Turning from sin

If any one is left out... it loses its virtue.”

We ought to have ready all these ingredients...but we often wait until one boils over to the next.

Let’s look at the ingredients “*Sight of Sin*” and “*Sorrow for Sin*”. Do we see our sin for what it is? Where do we recognize sin in our lives... in our hearts? Jesus said, “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person” (Mark 7:21-23). Paul wrote, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:9-10). Can we admit we are sinners? Or do we try to hide from our sin? Do we think it wise to neglect sin, presuming it will go away? Do we say “I don’t like to think about it”? Try that when you have an infected tooth and your talking to our dentist! Or when you have appendicitis and your talking to your doctor! You’ll think about it... eventually! Will the sight of our sin boil over into sorrow? After Peter had denied Jesus, he “went out and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:62). Paul in full view of his sin whaled, “O, what a wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:24). But is the elixir of repentance complete with only sin and sorrow. Remember Judas Iscariot had sin and sorrow... and he went and hanged himself. The rich young ruler heard what Jesus had to say about his imperfections and “became very sad” (Luke 18:23). Yet we have no indication he did anything about it. There are two types of sorrow according to the Bible. “*Godly sorrow* produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas *worldly sorrow* produces death” (2 Cor 7:10). When we see our sin... which sorrow are we brought to?

Let’s look at the ingredients “*Confession of Sin*” and “*Shame for Sin*”. Who do we Confess our sins to? John wrote, “If we *confess* our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Do we have good friends? Do we have a church family where we can do this? Confession can be a wonderful experience among Christian peers. Does confession boil over into shame? Sometimes this happens quite naturally in the midst of our confession with a trembling voice and tearful eyes. Confession of sin and shame are good things. Shame comes by God’s grace. But what do we do with it? Do we sit and stew in shame? Do we try to drown out shame with various numbing agents? Do we isolate because of shame? Proverbs tells us, “Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment” (Proverbs 18:1). I’ve had brothers who disappear because of shame. They choose to isolate. Why? Because despite the shame, they still seek “their own desire”. They do not want to finish the recipe of repentance. The recipe is still lacking if we have only Sin, Sorrow, Confession, and Shame...

Let's look at the final ingredients "*Hatred for Sin*" and "*Turning from Sin*". Do we hate our sin? "O you who love the LORD, *hate* evil" (Ps 97:10). Jeremiah Burrows, in the *Evil of Evils*, tells us,

"Suppose that God should bring any of you to the brink of that bottomless gulf and open it to you, and there you should see those damned creatures sweltering under the wrath of the infinite God, and there you should hear the dreadful and hideous cries and shrieks of those who are under such soul-amazing and soul-sinking torments through the wrath of the Almighty. Yet, I say, there is more evil in one sinful thought than there is in all these everlasting burnings... Yet, the truth is, that if it should come into competition whether we would endure all the torments that are in hell to all eternity rather than commit one sin, I say, if our spirits were as they out to be, we would rather be willing to endure all these torments than commit the least sin."

Do we hate our sin enough... to turn from it? Jesus said, "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell" (Mat 5:29-30). Will we act *violently* against sin? Will we act *immediately* against sin? Will we act *permanently* against sin? "Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil" (1 John 3:8). "No one born of God makes a practice of sinning" (1 John 3:9). This is not an isolated statement from Jesus. Jesus' last words to the churches in Revelation required them to *conquer* sin. Jesus said,

- ❖ To Ephesus, "To the one who *conquers*... I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." (Rev 2:7)
- ❖ To Smyrna, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life... The one who *conquers* will not be hurt by the second death." (Rev 2:10-11)
- ❖ To Pergamum, "To the one who *conquers*... I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone..." (Rev 2:17)
- ❖ To Thyatira, "The one who *conquers*... and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations..." (Rev 2:26)
- ❖ To Sardis, "The one who *conquers*... will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life." (Rev 3:5)
- ❖ To Philadelphia, "The one who *conquers*..., I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God." (Rev 3:12)
- ❖ To Laodicea, "The one who *conquers*..., I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne." (Rev 3:21)

I find it noteworthy, that Jesus required five of the churches to *repent* or *wake up*, two of the churches to *hold fast* and *be faithful*, but all seven churches to *conquer*! Are we conquering sin? Don't look at yesterday... We need to take a larger sample. What do we see over the last year? Do we have any inward vigor, passion, or drive for holiness? We are to "strive for peace with everyone, and for *holiness* without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). This doesn't mean we are perfect. We are all sinners. But are we are working toward holiness? A child's Mother's Day card may be misspelled and have a picture of mom that looks nothing like her. Yet it is pleasing to Mom because it was the child's best attempt to please her. There should be a desire to please our God with our holy living.

J.C. Ryle, in his book on Holiness, writes,

“Even if you could enter heaven without holiness, what would you do there? What joy would you feel? What holy woman or man of God would you sit down with for fellowship? Their pleasures are not your pleasures! Their character is nothing of your character! What they love you do not love!”

Keven DeYoung, preaching at T4G 2016, said,

“How astounding to think if we have no interest in a holy God now, why we think we ought to be with him for eternity? If worship does not capture your attention at present, what makes you think it will thrill you in some heavenly future? If ungodliness is your delight here on earth, what will please you in heaven when all is clean, and pure? You would not be happy there... If you are not holy here.”

God’s desire is to grant us repentance. He will give us what we need to grow in holiness. But is there any indication... that we want it?

So why discuss Repentance? Firstly, that our sickness of sin might meet its Christ given remedy. We’re confronted with sin daily... It’s the air we breathe in the fallen world all around us. And today is a day, like every other day, where we need to put sin to death. Some of us may need to sell our idols, pay our bills, and follow Jesus. Some of us may need to put down the junk food and go for a walk with Jesus, regularly. Some of us may need to dump our alcohol, or whatever “it” is, down the toilet and find some Christian friends. Some of us may need to quell our anger, and pray for those who offend us. Some of us may need to give up our future... and discover God’s future instead. Secondly, that we might know the joy of repentance. What would it be like if by God’s grace... we *repented*? If empowered by the Holy Spirit... we *conquered* sin? Would we find holiness? Absolutely... Would we experience new life? Abundantly! What joy awaits those who turn from their sin and turn to God. Let us therefore, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”