

Things to Know about Repentance

In Christian circles, repentance has become something of a hot topic. The controversial nature of the subject reflects an age old problem of how we understand the problem of sin in the life of a believer. In actuality, our general understanding of the word *repentance* is sufficient for salvation. However, living the Christian life presents challenges that then raise doubts about our sincerity when we turned to Christ to be saved. This in turn has challenged preachers to get more explicit in defining repentance and the Proverb is true, In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin... (Prov 10:19) We need to take a moment to untangle some very real concerns about repentance.

1. First things first.

Simply stated, repentance refers to the change in our lives when we turned to Christ for salvation. As we consider the nature of repentance, we need to make sure from the outset that we understand that it is not *repentance* that saves, but the work of Christ on the cross. People can have an outward appearance without actually being saved, as we will consider in a moment.

Rom 5:10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

Oswald Chambers wrote:

It is not repentance that saves me; repentance is the sign that I realise what God has done in Christ Jesus. The danger is to put the emphasis on the effect instead of on the cause—"It is my obedience that puts me right with God, my consecration." Never! I am put right with God because prior to all, Christ died. **When I turn to God and by belief accept what God reveals I can**

accept, instantly the stupendous Atonement of Jesus Christ rushes me into a right relationship with God, and by the supernatural miracle of God's grace I stand justified, not because I am sorry for my sin, not because I have repented, [although these things *precede* and *lead* to salvation] but because of what **Jesus has done**. The spirit of God brings it with a breaking, all-over light, and I know, though I do not know how, that I am saved.

The salvation of God does not stand on human logic, it stands on the sacrificial Death of Jesus. We can be born again because of the Atonement of Our Lord. **Sinful men and women can be changed into new creatures, not by their repentance or their belief, but by the marvellous work of God in Christ Jesus which is prior to all experience. The impregnable safety of justification and sanctification is God Himself.** We have not to work out these things ourselves; they have been worked out by the Atonement: The supernatural becomes natural by the miracle of God; there is the realisation of what Jesus Christ has already done—"*It is finished.*"¹

2. The necessity of repentance.

Repentance is *necessary*. Someone cannot merely add religion into their sinful lives. Jesus came to call sinners to *repentance*.

Matt 9:13 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.

¹Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, "October 28, Justification by Faith"

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

With greater light comes greater judgement. The more we know, the more we are held accountable for.

Matt 11:20-22 Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:

21Woe 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.

22But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.

We start off with sufficient light to see our sin, but then throughout life the Holy Spirit is at work challenging mankind over his sin.

John 1:1-9 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2The same was in the beginning with God.

3All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

4In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

...

9*That* was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

John 16:7-8 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

8And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

3. True repentance.

In the end, repentance is a simple changing of the mind, a flip of a switch, a choice to be honest with yourself, confessing that you are a sinner, and giving in to God. A big problem is that although many things that are *part* of repentance fall short of repentance by themselves. The one who dies in his sins might *flirt* with repentance and allow himself to be satisfied that he has gone far enough but just can't bring himself to fully give in to God. Some of the saddest words in the Bible were spoken by King Agrippa as he sat in judgment of Paul, the apostle. After Paul's careful defense of the Gospel, he addressed Agrippa.

Acts 26:26-28 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things [the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ] are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

27King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

28Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

There are two things that are a *result* of repentance, but should not be confused with repentance itself. When someone has accepted Christ as their Savior, they will have a change of values and a change of behavior. These two things can be imitated by the world, but the real problem is when the Christian uses these as a measure of salvation. If a Christian depends on values and behavior as *proof* of his salvation, he will always be in doubt, not knowing if he has changed enough. This can produce a *works based* theology of salvation with a Christian always trying to *do* more to prove to himself he is a Christian.

- Not a change of values

For some people, repentance is

simply changing what they value based on their lusts, not because of their offense to God. You do not simply turn into a Christian because you think Christianity is nicer than some other religion. You do not turn into a Christian because you like Heaven better than Hell. You do not turn into a Christian because you like the Christian lifestyle better than a hedonistic lifestyle. We often introduce the idea that there is a problem that all mankind has to face by asking the challenging question, "If you were to die today, do you know 100% for sure that you are going to heaven?" Not wanting to go to Hell is a good reason to consider what God has to say, but just buying a fire insurance policy doesn't make you a Christian. Some people actually have said, "I know I am going to heaven because I don't want to go to Hell." Just because you *like* the idea of Heaven better than Hell doesn't mean you are a Christian. *Liking* Heaven better than Hell is only a good *start*. That should lead us to realize that our sin against a Holy, Just, and Loving God has put us in a great jeopardy that only *Jesus'* suffering on the cross took care of.

Just changing values will produce a Christian *culture*, but not a Christian. Just living with Christian values will certainly produce a more *pleasant* culture but it will be prone to corruption being pulled off into any number of political, philosophical and false religious systems.

- Not simply a change in behavior

A change in behavior *is* something that really *should* accompany repentance as John the Baptist called for.

Matt 3:7-11 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?

8Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

The Galatians were being persuaded that their salvation depended on keeping

the Law after they were saved. Paul argued that since salvation is not based on the keeping of the Law, *staying* saved was not based on keeping the Law.

Gal 3:1-5 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

2This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

The word for *obey* in vs. 1 is translated as *believe* sometimes and as *obey* other times and speaks of being fully persuaded to the point of acting upon the belief. In this case, they had been fully persuaded by the truth and acted upon it by *receiving the Spirit*, or in other words, they became born again.

3Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

4Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if *it be* yet in vain.

5He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, *doeth he it* by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

A *lack* of change in behavior should call into question if someone is truly saved, but we have to be careful not to define the basis of salvation by how many good works someone has performed.

Titus 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

- Not just mental assent

Often we refer to belief not being just a matter of mental assent, but it is also

true of repentance. People can acknowledge that you are right but *still* not agree with you. One can agree that Jesus Christ is a historical figure and that according to Christian doctrine he can be saved by trusting in Him as his savior, but that doesn't mean he believes it for himself.

Jas 2:19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

The devils intellectually knew who God was, but they are opposed to Him anyway. There is a problem with the way some claim a soul won for Christ. They think that by getting someone to agree even that Jesus died on the cross for their sin indicates that the person has turned and become a Christian. Acknowledging a historical fact does not mean that someone has turned their heart to Christ.

Rom 10:8-10 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, *even* in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;

9That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

- Not just remorse

Matt 27:3 Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,

The repentance of Judas was not true self-judgment because of the sin he had committed. The word used here is not the ordinary one for “repented,” which implies a complete change of mind or attitude. It rather means “to be

remorseful,” and there may be bitter remorse apart from genuine repentance.

Spurgeon pointed out a number of men, including Judas who likewise uttered the doubtful confession, "I have sinned" – Pharaoh with a hardened heart, Balaam the double-minded, Achan the doubtful penitent, and Judas the uncommitted.²

The occasion for the writing of Psalm 51 is given in the superscription "A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." It took a while for David to be dealt with, but in the end he produced this Psalm expressing *true* remorse which leads to repentance, confession, and restoration.

Ps 51:1-10 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

2Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

3For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin *is* ever before me.

4Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear when thou judgest.

5Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

6Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden *part* thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

7Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8Make me to hear joy and gladness; *that* the bones *which* thou hast broken may rejoice.

9Hide thy face from my sins, and

²<https://ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons03/sermons03.vii.html>

blot out all mine iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

- A change of mind *with conviction*

The word for repent commonly comes from a Greek word meaning *to change the mind*. Paul described that kind of repentance as one accompanied with *conviction*. Conviction is described very well in the dictionary as a strong persuasion or belief, being convinced, the act of convincing a person of error or of compelling the admission of a truth. Listen to how the Corinthians had been convicted and repented over a sin Paul had addressed in his first letter to the Corinthians:

2Cor 7:9-11 Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.

10 For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

11 For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, *what* clearing of yourselves, yea, *what* indignation, yea, *what* fear, yea, *what* vehement desire, yea, *what* zeal, yea, *what* revenge! In all *things* ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

4. Maintaining the effect of repentance.

Repentance precedes salvation, but it is something that we are called to do all through this life. While we are still in this earthly body we are prone to temptation. Once we are saved, we are destined to receive that new body.

Eph 1:5 Having predestinated us

unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

Rom 8:22-23 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

23And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body.

The time will come in the resurrection when we will be delivered from this body, but in the mean time the Bible teaches that we will have a struggle. Don't be surprised by that struggle. continue on in your growth in God's Word which will change both your eternity and your life now.

Gal 5:16-17 *This* I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

17For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

Acts 2:41-42 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls.

42And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Is God's Word manifest in your life? Do you feel somehow threatened by the idea of change? Have we turned over our time, priorities, entertainment, recreation, church involvement as a result of a change of heart towards God? As you open your heart to what God has for you it will make a *joyful* difference and open up so much of heavenly living to you.

1. First things first. Rom 5:10
2. The necessity of repentance. Matt 9:13,17, Matt 11:20-22, John 1:1-9, John 16:7-8
3. True repentance. Acts 26:26-28, Matt 3:7-11, Gal 3:1-5, Titus 3:5, Jas 2:19, Rom 10:8-10, Matt 27:3, Ps 51:1-10, 2Cor 7:9-11
4. Maintaining the effect of repentance. Eph 1:5, Rom 8:22-23, Gal 5:16-17 , Acts 2:41-42