

## Repentance

Let us examine this simple word that has become all but totally obsolete and stripped of its biblical relevance or importance in the modernized, enlightened realm of “Christian teachings”. Webster’s definition of the word is somewhat consistent with its biblical meaning. The dictionary defines the word “repent” as “to feel sorry or self-reproachful for what one has done or failed to do, be conscience-stricken, or contrite.” The word is translated “repent” from three slight variations of the Greek word “metamorphos.” Collectively these mean, “to care afterwards, regret, transform, metamorphos, change, transfigure, think differently or afterwards, compunction for guilt, reformation.” Why am I making so much ado about a word rarely even mentioned, let alone preached about from most pulpits? Because it is one of the three most important words in the entire lexicon dealing with salvation! These vital pre-requisites to salvation are repentance, belief and faith, and each requires our in-depth understanding of what they mean and how they must be applied if eternal security is to be secured. Wait a minute you say, “Doesn’t Ephesians 2:8 say that we are saved by grace through faith?” And then you say, “doesn’t Romans 10:9 say that if we confess with our mouths the Lord Jesus, and believe in our hearts that God has raised Him from the dead, that we are saved?” To these Scriptural references I say, absolutely, that is what they say and therefore most certainly their sincere application provides assurance of salvation. Then you ask, “Then what is the big deal about repentance? If belief and faith do it for us then why belabor this point about repentance when no one else does?” I’m glad you asked!

At the very beginning of the New Testament, in Matthew 3:2, right after Jesus’ genealogy and the issues surrounding His birth are dealt with, we have John the Baptist entering the scene with a resounding voice saying “*Repent ye: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*” Then in Mark 6:12 after Jesus had instructed the disciples, he tells us that “*and they went out, and preached that men should repent.*” Then we find in Luke 13:3 Jesus is quoted saying “*I tell you, nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*” Jesus repeats this again in verse 5.

In Acts 2:38 we read, *“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.”* In Acts 3:19 Peter again says, *“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...”* In Acts 17:30 Peter says *“...And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.”* In Acts 26:20 Paul is on trial in front of a king describing the details of his ministry. His principal message as he described it, is that he preached to both Jews and Gentiles *“...that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet with repentance”* In Luke 24:47 Jesus says, *“And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached among all nations beginning in Jerusalem.”* Finally in 2Peter 3:9 we are assured that our Lord *“...is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”*

Lets first look at this last notation, where, through Peter, the Holy Spirit has told us that God doesn't want any to perish, *“...but that all should come to repentance.”* This indicates that there are two kinds of people, those who perish, and those who repent. From this we can only conclude that repentance must be very closely related to redemption, because, it's equally true that all who do not repent are the ones who perish! Could it be any clearer? Without repentance, there is no salvation! Look back at Mark 1:15 where Jesus says *“...repent and believe the Gospel.”* After that we are told that Jesus instructed the disciples and they went across the countryside *“preaching that man should repent.”* From this we can see that “repent” was the key, the primary message. It is not that faith and belief were not essential to salvation, but that repentance was somehow a guiding principal or perhaps a prerequisite essential for salvation. The validity of this premise seems to be confirmed in Luke 13:3, when Jesus says that unless you repent you will perish. Again, a lack of repentance is an assurance of eternal damnation, which is very clearly just what perish means!

In Acts 2:38, Peter tells his audience to repent and be baptized in Jesus' name so their sins would be forgiven and that they could then receive the Holy Spirit. Let's examine this a little more closely. We know that water baptism doesn't save souls and is not an

essential ingredient of salvation. It's a graphical, physical, public expression of ones commitment to, and fellowship or association with, Jesus, in His death and resurrection. Anyone can go through this simply as a ritual, and have no saving faith whatsoever.

We also know that the Holy Spirit takes up residency in the heart the instant one becomes redeemed. Notice that in this verse Peter says nothing about "belief" or "faith". This verse might be interpreted in several ways. However, if it is taken literally, from a salvation perspective, Peter is directing his audience to simply, "repent." What results from the proper application of this word alone, is the remissions of sins, and the receipt of the Holy Spirit! Effectually, repentance is given as a formula for salvation without any mention of belief or faith! Therefore, it appears that we can conclude that repentance, in its full context, is a state of the mind and heart that all by itself provides salvation. This again is strongly implied in Luke 24:47, as quoted above, where Jesus instructs His disciples quite simply that they are to preach "repentance and the remission of sins" throughout the world.

Let's look at just one more of these verses regarding the matter of repentance, in Acts 3:19 we are urged to, "*Repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out.*" However, in Acts 16:31, the Holy Sprit tells us to "*...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved...*," and Romans 10:9 we are told "*That 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.*" In Ephesians 2:8 we are assured that we are "*saved by grace through faith.*" From these verses we find that salvation comes through belief alone, and faith alone, and repentance alone! Could this mean that there are three alternative ways to salvation, faith, belief and repentance? Hardly!! Then what is going on? I may be alone in this thought, but there is something profound here to be chewed, swallowed and digested!

For those earnestly seeking salvation, and for those who believe they have it, but are willing to examine its legitimacy, this should be an important question for which to find a solid answer. It should also serve to raise the question as to why this word repentance

sits on the back shelf of almost every church assembly and evangelical out-reach group, hidden and drawing dust rather than being taught, as it was in the early church. Shouldn't it be a major and frequent theme being preached from every pulpit? What is the cause of the near universal avoidance of the word within the so-called Christian church? It cannot be its lack of importance. The quotations noted cry out otherwise! Is it ignorance of Scripture among those who "spread the word"? Is it fear of emptying pews if its meaning is seriously preached? Perhaps it is the manifestation of prophecies regarding these end times when false teachers with deceitful tongues would preach only pleasant cheerful messages, and deliberately avoid those that could lead souls to repentance. Paul, in 2Timothy 4:3-4 sums up the point perfectly when he says, "*for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ear; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*" To varying degrees each of these reasons has tragically contributed to repentance languishing, abandoned on the back shelf of Christian doctrinal teaching and preaching. A graphic example of why the faint of hearts who may know better, yet fail to focus on the subject may be found in the study of the Old Testament prophets who bravely expressed the vital importance of what this word means. Most were killed for their bravery in this respect. Look at Jeremiah for instance, God commanded him to prophesize and preach repentance continually for 40 years, but first He warned him that he would not convince anyone, and would suffer greatly for his obedience. Because of his preaching of repentance, he was beaten, imprisoned, left to suffer in a cesspool and exiled to Egypt. His friends and even his own brothers conspired to kill him for no reason other than for his message of repentance, a word they didn't want to hear.

Belief and faith are seemingly innocuous concepts that can easily be absorbed in the mind but sometimes never reach the heart where they must exist for the soul to find salvation. Repentance on the other hand, requires a turning, a humbling, and an unvarnished recognition of a hopelessly sinful nature that can only be corrected by a Redeemer, our blessed Lord and Savior Christ Jesus. That demands a commitment too big for many,

and provides the real test, which separates the possessor of the saving faith from the mere professor of an ineffectual faith.

On this basis, it is essential that we come to a true understanding of just what repentance means in the context of Christian belief, for how else can we apply this obviously essential element of salvation?

1. Repentance is a conscious, serious, life-altering change; it is a change of mind about what sin really is, and having great sorrow for having lived a life of sin. But mere sorrow of mind no matter how sincere is not repentance. It must be a Godly sorrow. In 2Corinthians 7:10 we are told *“For Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”* Worldly sorrow for sins is quite common, but it has no effective relationship to repentance that leads to salvation. The natural human conscience can be very sensitive to sin, and the resulting regrets and desires to repent from them can be very sincere, but that is not Godly repentance. Absent a truly Godly sorrow there is no genuine repentance. Godly repentance must be accompanied by a resolve, and a holy longing and desire that with Gods strength we can escape from its clutches. Real repentance is not only accompanied by a fear of God’s wrath, but also by the sweetness of His love, as we grow in knowledge of who He is.
2. Repentance is a profound sense of shame for having lived in sin, and a longing to avoid it forever. And as Spurgeon says, that “sorrow for sin is a perpetual rain, a sweet soft shower which to a gracious man, last all his life long.” He also observes that it is a “sorrow which is associated with a believing faith, for Godly sorrow must be one that makes the heart that feels it yield itself to Christ. Yielding itself to Christ, it must believe in Christ. For if I do not believe in Christ, it is certain that I have not yielded myself to Him.” We must therefore conclude also that if one has not yielded to Christ, then one is not an effectual believer in Christ! How grievous it is, or should be, for a redeemed to soul to sin, realizing that it is by ones own election to do so, and knowing that each sin is against the One who has been our Redeemer of sins. To the extent that we continue to do so

- with a Godly shame and firm resolve to no longer do so, are we not spitting in His face and admitting that our repentance, belief and faith are nothing but a sham.
3. Repentance is recognition of our own hopeless sinful nature, a nature from which we realize that only Christ Jesus can rescue us. Today there seems to be much preaching on the remedy for all sins, that is, that by believing, we are saved. However the true nature of what it is that we are to be saved from is often ignored. Spurgeon reminds us that “it will never do for men to be led to think that they are healed before we know that we are sick unto death, or to imagine that they are clothed before they see themselves to be naked, or to be taught to trust in Christ before that are aware that they have anything for which they need to trust Him.”
  4. Repentance is a turning around, a change of ones whole being regarding sin, along with a keenly focused turning toward Jesus, believing in, and choosing to live in obedience to Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Isn't this the change of ones whole being that Jesus meant when He said to Nicodemus “*..except a man be born-again, he cannot see the kingdom of God?*” It's being born again as a whole new spiritual being. Above all things, we must remember (although Calvinists would not agree) that repentance, as with faith, is of our own volition, but after its first spark, God's grace will fertilize and water it to make it grow strong. Serious prayer, praise of our Lord, and gratitude for His love, guidance and mercy will cause the “Son-shine” energy needed for more rapid and stronger growth.

From this, we must conclude that repentance is an essential ingredient in providing redemption. If so, just where is it in this chain of events? Is it something that happens before or after believing, or when we receive the grace through faith spoken of in Ephesians 2:8? I believe that Spurgeon gave an astute answer to that question when he responded, “Which spoke in a wheel moves first when the wheel starts.” In other words they are simultaneous! But the fact is, it is even more profound that that!

Repentance, belief and faith are simply three words, the meanings of which are bound in unity, as are the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit! Not one of these exists without the

other two. Without repentance, there is no forgiveness of sins. Without repentance there is no valid belief; without repentance there is no saving faith; and without repentance there is no justification, no sanctification, and no promise of a heavenly home! This is a profound and essential truth that I didn't realize until I reached this point in my journey regarding the meaning of repentance. Consider this, as a way of recapitulation of what has been presented above.

1. Scripture tells us several times that if we believe in Jesus we are saved.
2. Scripture tells us several times that it is grace through faith that saves us.
3. Scripture tells us several times it is through repentance, we are saved.

Now back to the earlier question; does that mean there are 3 paths to salvation? Again, certainly not! Well, if it doesn't mean that, then it can only mean that the three are an integrated whole, without which salvation is impossible! Implicit in the word "faith," there must exist belief and repentance. In the word "belief" there must be "faith" and "repentance," and in "repentance" must also be found both "belief" and "faith!" If this is true, and I believe the evidence is compelling that it is, I ask again, why do we almost hardly ever hear the word repentance coming from the pulpits or from evangelical leaders? I'm already given the sad painful answer. But please suffer my repetition for a moment, while I summarize with, what I pray, will be more effective and complete. We don't hear the word repentance because:

1. Perhaps, collectively we don't want to hear it, or to "face up to it," anymore than they did in Old Testament times. We prefer ignorance to any cramping of our lifestyle, as has all of humanity through out the ages. The words "faith" and "belief" are seemingly innocuous and don't, as commonly understood; cause much of a threat to ones life style.
2. Some of those who preach and teach "the Word" fail to understand the essential nature of repentance as a requirement for salvation. How can they, or why should they when the "soft" definitions of "belief" and "faith" seem to be all that are necessary.

3. Others may fear what dwelling on it would do to the pew population and the “box office receipts.” They prefer to compromise the saving of souls to the loss of pew warmers and check writers. This type is exemplified in the highly popular very wealthy mega churches where they have abandoned the preaching for genuine belief or faith for the sake of mammon and ego. Many of these also fall into category 4 below.
4. The pulpits and airways seem to be filling up with non-believers who deliberately and knowingly preach what pleases but does not save. These are the false teachers spoken of by Jesus, and are also described in the Epistles as those who would proliferate in these end times, deliberately preaching false doctrines.

Dear soul if you think that you are riding a heaven-bound wagon, I beg you to stop, get off, and look at the wheels. Count the spokes, and you don't see one that is called repentance, stay off that wagon because, it will never deliver you to the heavenly realm. The modern usage of the words “believe” and “faith” has stripped them of much of their vital roots, and thereby weakens and deprives them of the fuller depth of meaning they had in the early days of Christianity when the New Testament was written. From the verses quoted, it should be evident that this greater depth of meaning included a greater sense of resolve of persevering commitment and at least the essence of the meaning of that word “repent”. How else can one explain the independent ways to salvation that he several verses herein quoted seems to establish? Given the comparative weakness and even superficially of the words “belief” and “faith” as they are used today, isn't it a tragic thing for the seeking soul to be introduced to Christianity through these words absent the introduction of the word “repentance” as well? I pray that those who find the above disturbing, non-scriptural, even offensive, before they condemn the premise of the essay, will prayerfully re-examine God's Word in this context so as to make a solid Scriptural based conclusion regarding this matter of the position and importance of repentance in the process of salvation.