

BIBLICAL TRUTH ABOUT MAN, SIN, AND SALVATION

Lesson 23: Repentance

This is the tenth of seventeen lessons on the biblical doctrine of salvation (soteriology, from Greek *soteria*, salvation). This lesson takes a look at the important topic of repentance. This biblical truth is concerned with the sinner's response to Christ and the Gospel message, a response that involves turning from sin. It involves a change of mind about God, Christ, sin, and the need of forgiveness. This change of thinking leads to a change of heart (godly sorrow for sin and desire for holiness) and ultimately to a change of behavior (godly living). Repentance may be likened to a spiritual u-turn.

Lesson 23 – Central Truth Q and A

Question: How do sinners repent?

Answer: Sinners repent by turning to God from sin with their whole heart and life.

Lesson 23 – Memory Verses

Luke 5:32 *I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.*

2 Corinthians 7:10 *For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.*

1. An Example of Personal Repentance

During his ministry, the apostle Paul defended himself before several Roman leaders: two governors—Felix (Acts 24:1-21) and Festus (Acts 25:1-12); and a regional king, Agrippa (Acts 26). In his appearance before Agrippa Paul explained that he had been a devoted Pharisee and he had opposed Jesus Christ and his followers, throwing them into jail, voting to kill others, and violently persecuting Christians wherever he could find them. Paul's life was dedicated to persistent opposition to Christ and his people. But in one decisive moment, all of that changed as Paul traveled on the Damascus road to carry out his evil intentions. Suddenly Christ appeared to Paul, not to punish him, but to save him and make him a disciple and ultimately a missionary and church planter. Paul's life was never the same because he repented and was transformed from being a Christ-hater to a Christ-lover and follower. Paul the madman became Paul the missionary. Paul the persecutor became Paul the preacher. God so changed his life that Paul turned away from a life of self-righteousness to a life of faith and obedience to Christ (Phil. 3). God also turned Paul into a powerful ambassador and preacher-teacher of Gospel truth and minister to the churches.

2. The Message of Biblical Repentance

Paul became a preacher-teacher of repentance (Acts 17:29-31; Rom. 2:4), just like John the Baptist (Mt. 3:2, and Christ (Mt. 4:11), and Peter (Acts 2:38) before him. The message of repentance is important because no one can enter the Kingdom of God without it. After his resurrection Christ gave the commission to his disciples to preach the message of repentance and forgiveness to all nations (Lk. 24:47). Repentance means that a sinner turns from enjoying and living in sin to hating and grieving

over sin and then living in righteousness. Paul explains that godly sorrow leads to repentance and repentance leads to salvation (2 Cor. 7:9-10). Repentance must include a heartfelt sorrow for sin and a determination to stop sinning and a desire to love, worship and serve God (1 Thess. 1:9-10). Repentance is a change of mind and heart that leads to a changed way of life.

3. The Danger of False Repentance

Despite clear biblical teaching about repentance, there is much confusion about genuine repentance. False repentance is a dangerous counterfeit for the true change that God requires. The Bible provides some examples of false repentance: Esau regretted selling his birthright, but did not receive God's grace because he never truly repented (Heb. 12:15-17); Judas Iscariot felt remorse and returned the money he received for betraying Jesus (Mt. 27:3-5), but he never turned to God with a broken heart. True repentance is a work of God in the sinner's heart. It is not merely an attempt at self-improvement or "turning over a new leaf." It is a gift of God's grace and an act of His power. Only God can change our hearts and make us capable of repenting, and He does this in His gracious work of regeneration (new birth). The new life begun in divine regeneration is continued in lifelong repentance. Genuine faith and repentance begin with regeneration but they always continue in lifelong sanctification.

The following notes are from Pastor Stan's sermon preached in February 2015, "Repent or Perish."

Subject: *Repent or Perish*

Scripture: *Luke 13:1-5*

Jesus used two tragic events to teach the need for repentance. John MacArthur said: "Biblical Christianity has lost its voice. The church is preaching a gospel designed to soothe rather than confront sinful individuals. Churches have turned to amusement and show business to try and win the world. Those methods may seem to draw crowds for a season. But they're not *God's* methods, and therefore they are destined to fail. In the meantime, the church is being infiltrated and corrupted by professing believers who have never repented, never turned from sin, and therefore, never really embraced Christ as Lord or Savior. We must return to the message God has called us to preach. We need to confront sin and call sinners to repentance – to a radical break from the love of sin and a seeking of the Lord's mercy. That is, after all, the gospel He has called us to proclaim."

1. THE MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE

A Christian leader described worship in the churches of Eastern Europe: "Their services are worshipful, subdued, yet intensely passionate. Prayer for the lost and personal evangelism are on the hearts and minds of these people more than social activities and sports. The focus of their message to the world is a clear call to repentance." He goes on to say that they refer to new Christians as "repenters."

The Great Commission of Christ is recorded in the Bible five times (in each of the four Gospels and once in Acts). Luke 24:47 is the text that contains the message of the Gospel.

Luke 24:47 *And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.* Without repentance there is no remission (forgiveness) of sins. Unless we are preaching repentance we are not preaching the message Jesus commanded. The Gospel includes not only what Christ did for us, but also what we must do. Repentance has always been at the heart of God's message:

- A. Old Testament prophets preached repentance – **Isaiah 55:7** *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*
- B. John the Baptist preached repentance – **Matthew 3:1-2** ¹ *In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, ² And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*
- C. Jesus preached repentance – **Matthew 4:17** *From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. **Matthew 11:20** Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not.*
- D. The twelve apostles preached repentance – **Mark 6:12** *And they went out, and preached that men should repent.*
- E. Peter preached repentance – **Acts 2:38** *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.*
- F. Paul preached repentance – **Acts 20:20-21** ²⁰ *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, ²¹ Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

2. THE MEANING OF REPENTANCE

Since repentance is an essential part of the Gospel message, it is not surprising that Satan has tried to remove it or deceive people with partial or false teaching. I recently asked someone who happened to be a Roman Catholic what he believed about repentance. He paused and said, "I've heard about penance, but I've never heard about repentance." Many people have never heard the truth about repentance, so it is imperative that we know the truth and then tell others what God says about repentance.

Repentance is not penance or a religious act we must do to earn God's favor. Repentance is not regret or remorse. Judas felt remorse, but he didn't repent. Some people are sorry about the consequences of sin, but they are not sorry for their sin. Repentance is not resolution or trying to do better. Repentance has been defined as "that inward change of mind, affections, convictions, and commitment rooted in the fear of God and sorrow for offenses committed against him, which when accompanied by faith in Jesus Christ, results in an outward turning from sin to God and his service in all of life" (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 936). To put it in simple terms, repentance is a change of

mind that leads to a change of attitude and ultimately a change of behavior. Real repentance involves three things:

- A. A change of mind – The word repentance (Gk., *metanoia*) actually means a change of mind. When a person repents he changes his mind about sin, about God, and about Christ. But it must go beyond just a change of mind.
- B. A change of attitude – The NT word for repent means to have a change of mind, but the OT word means to sigh, lament, or grieve. It is a godly sorrow for sin, a brokenness over sin.
2 Corinthians 7:10 *For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.*
Samuel Rutherford said: “A repenting man is more angry at his own heart for sinning than he is at the devil for tempting him.”
- C. A change of behavior – It is a turning away from sin and a desire to live for God. When a person repents, he is not only broken over his sin, he is broken from it. He confesses sin and also forsakes it (Prov. 28:13).

We see all three components of repentance in Christ’s parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:17-20). Luke 15 tells us that God rejoices when a sinner repents (Lk. 15:7, 10). Conversion involves repentance (turning from sin) and faith (turning to Christ). They are not identical, but they are inseparable, like two sides of the same coin.

Repentance is a gift from God. **Acts 5:30-31** ³⁰ *The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. ³¹ Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. Acts 11:18* *When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. 2 Timothy 2:24-25 ²⁴ *And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, ²⁵ In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.**