The Call to Repentance
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 90-22

As you know, we are studying together a series on the lordship of Jesus Christ in reference to salvation. Tonight we come to the third message in our series, entitled “The Call to Repentance.” The nature of this series is that it is from selected scriptures rather than the normal approach that I take from one given passage. It is also the nature of this series that it is polemic; that is to say, it is issue-oriented. It tends to be argumentative in taking a view and posing another and wrong view, as far as I’m concerned. This is something we don’t do very often, but from time to time we have felt the need to preach on certain things that are being taught which we feel are not consistent with the Word of God. And as I said at the very outset of our series, I have been dealing with this for a number of years. In fact, over about ten years or more, this has been a subject of major concern to me, and, in fact, I’ve been in the process of writing a book on the subject for approximately four years, which book is now complete. In fact, I read it through, I did all of the final editing on the manuscript this week, and it is all now in the hands of the publisher for final revision, and then should be released in May. It has to do with this whole subject of what is the gospel. The title of the book is *The Gospel According to Jesus*. And we have listened to many people tell us what the gospel is. It’s my conviction we ought to listen to Jesus and see what He has to say.

One of the elements at stake in this very, very far-reaching debate is the matter of repentance: What is it, and where does it fit? Is it an essential part of the gospel message or is it not? And I hope tonight as we look together at God’s Word and consider some of the things that are being said by folks, that we might get a clear understanding of what the Bible has to say about repentance. Frankly, one of the clearest elements of biblical invitations to salvation is the demand for repentance. If you just took the New Testament and read it at face value, you would be pressed to conclude that repentance is an essential factor in a gospel presentation. To reinforce that to you, I’d like you to do just a little Bible study with me. Take your Bible and let’s start in Matthew chapter 3, and we’ll just follow a little bit through the gospel record into the book of Acts, a couple of notes in the epistles, and see what the sum of these verses is. In Matthew, chapter 3, we are introduced to the first New Testament evangel, none other than John the Baptist. In verse 1 of chapter 3 it says, “Now in those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea saying, ‘Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” Then in verse 8, further John said, “Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance.”

Then in chapter 4, verse 17, following John the Baptist, came the ministry of Jesus. “And from that time” – that is, the beginning of His ministry – “Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” Chapter 9 and verse 13: “Jesus said, ‘But go and learn what this

means: “I desire compassion and not sacrifice”” – that is, I desire a heart attitude, not external religion – “““for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners”” – “but sinners.” Let’s look at Mark, chapter 1, and verse 14, and again Mark introduces John. “After he had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and” – What was it? – “saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the gospel of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’” Chapter 2 of Mark, verse 17, “And hearing this, Jesus said to them, ‘It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’” And again we note the message of repentance given to sinners. Chapter 6, verse 12, of Mark, and here we find that the ministry has gone beyond John the Baptist, beyond Jesus, to the apostles, the disciples, and it says in verse 12, “they went out and preached that men should” – What? – “repent.”

Let’s look at Luke’s gospel and see how Luke chronicles the first preaching of the gospel of God. In Luke chapter 5 we are introduced again to this thought in verse 31, the ministry of Jesus, and here he expands on the record of Matthew and Mark, and in verse 31, “Jesus answered and said to them” – being the Pharisees and scribes – “‘It is not those who are well who need a physician but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.’” That was implied by Matthew, implied by Mark, and is explicitly stated by Luke as the ministry of Jesus was directed at sinners calling them to repentance.

The 13th chapter of Luke takes us deeper into the ministry of the gospel of God. “On the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered and said to them, ‘Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? I tell you no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.’”

Now, the questions being posed here are very interesting questions. What the people wanted to know was, How was it that there were some Galileans who went in to offer sacrifice to God, and Pilate’s men came in and slaughtered them while they were offering sacrifices to God? How is it, they’re saying, that God would allow people to give their life in a bloodbath when they were doing what was right? Why did God allow that? That’s the question. And Jesus says in verse 2, “I think you think that those Galileans must have been greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered that fate. But I’m telling you they’re just an example of what’s going to happen to you if you don’t repent.” And then the next question on their mind, How about those 18 people on whom that tower fell? These people weren’t worshiping God, they were just walking down the street, and the tower fell over and killed them. “Are you thinking,” Jesus said, “that they were worse culprits than everybody else who lived in Jerusalem, and that’s why they died? No,” He says, “unless you repent, you’ll die, too.” And in both cases He calls for repentance. The ministry of John: repent. The ministry of Jesus: repent. The ministry of the disciples: repent.

Let's go to Luke chapter 15, verse 7: "I tell you," Jesus says, after describing the man who lost the sheep and went to find the sheep, "when he comes home, he rejoices," and so forth. "I tell you that in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who" – What? – "repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." Verse 10, He tells a story about a woman who found a coin and rejoiced. "And in the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." And then He tells the story of the prodigal son, which is about a sinner who repented and a sinner who did not repent. The sinner who repented was the prodigal, and the sinner who would not repent was the brother who stayed in the house and wouldn't recognize his own sin. The ministry of John the Baptist was repentance. The ministry of Jesus was repentance. The ministry of the disciples was repentance. And heaven recognizes it and rejoices when a sinner – What? – repents, repents.

Chapter 16 of Luke; you know this record of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man died and went to Hades and was in torment. Lazarus, the beggar, died and went into the bosom of Abraham. And, of course, the rich man said, "Let me out of here so I can warn my brothers not to come here." "But Abraham said," in verse 29, "'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will'" – What? – "'repent.'"

Now, what you're beginning to sense here is that this concept of repent is the very essence of the gospel invitation. It is a call to repent. When they say here, when Abraham says, "They will" – rather, when the rich man says to Abraham - "They will repent," he is saying, "They will repent and believe the truth." That's all implied. But repentance is so obviously germane to the issue that the whole of gospel response could be summed up in the word "repent." John preached repentance. Jesus preached repentance. The disciples preached repentance. And the sinner here understood repentance.

Coming to the conclusion of Luke's gospel, and bringing it very close to home, chapter 24, verse 46, Jesus sums up the gospel. "Thus it is written," Luke 24:46, "that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." In other words, we are called to preach - What? - repentance. I hear a lot of people say they want to share their faith. I don't hear too many people say they want to go out and preach repentance. But that's really what we're called to do. We're called to preach repentance for forgiveness of sins; to proclaim it to all nations. Now, let's see what the early church did. Go to the book of Acts. Did they pick up on the ministry of John, and Jesus, and the disciples? Did they follow the instruction of the Great Commission that repentance for forgiveness was to be preached among all nations? Let's listen to Peter, Acts 2:38. Peter stands up on the day of Pentecost – this is the first sermon in the new era. The church is about to be founded and born after the resurrection. And what is the message that, in fact, is the invitation which gives birth to the church? Peter said in verse 38: "Repent"; "Repent." And he follows in the great train of John, and

Jesus, and the disciples, and follows obediently the commission of Luke 24:47. “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” And repentance, of course, provides for the forgiveness of your sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 3 of Acts, we follow further into the ministry of the early church, and here again, Peter is the preacher. This is his second sermon. He says to the Jews listening to him in verse 14, “You disowned the Holy and Righteous One; you asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of the all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled.” Now verse 19: “Repent, therefore, and return in order that your sins may be wiped away.” Again, the gospel message is a call to repentance.

Chapter 11 takes us further in the expansion of the church. And we find again in chapter 11, the apostle Peter is still the main figure. His duty here is to report to the Jews at Jerusalem what he has seen God do in saving Gentiles, namely Cornelius and his household. And in verse 18, it says, “When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, ‘Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.’”

Are you beginning to get the idea that repentance is a synonym for saving faith; that it’s an essential ingredient and element? Let’s go further. Acts 17, now we go into the ministry of the apostle Paul. And Paul finds himself in Acts 17 in the philosophical capital of the Hellenistic world, in none other than the city of Athens; finds himself on Mars Hill, on the Areopagus there, and he is interacting with the philosophers, the erudite of that city. And he gives them this message in verse 30: “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should” – What? – “repent”; repent – “because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world.” You better repent, because He’ll judge the world. He’ll judge it in righteousness. He’ll judge it through a man He appointed, a man who was proven to be worthy by being raised from the dead. So Paul preached repentance. Let’s go to chapter 20. Here Paul is instructing the Ephesian elders. The Ephesian elders were largely responsible for giving leadership to all the churches of Asia Minor. They were key leaders. And Paul reminds them in verse 21 that his ministry was to “solemnly testify to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul preached to church leaders the matter of repentance, knowing full well that they in turn were to preach repentance to others.

And then turn to chapter 26, verse 20. Here is Paul before King Agrippa, and he says to him in verse 19 of chapter 26, “Consequently, King Agrippa, I didn’t prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and throughout all the region of

Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance." Now folks, that was Paul's classic definition of gospel preaching. It is preaching repentance. And it was because he preached repentance that "they seized him," verse 21 says, "and tried to put me to death." So you can see that the early church picked up on the preaching of Jesus, and picked up on the preaching of John, and picked up on the preaching of the disciples, and was faithful to proclaim repentance from sin - turning from sin to God.

Paul writes in Romans 2:4, "Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" Now mark that. Mark that. The preaching of John was geared to repentance. The preaching of Jesus was geared to repentance. The preaching of the disciples was geared to repentance. The preaching of the early church was geared to repentance. And even the work of God is geared to produce repentance. Why? Because it says in 2 Peter again, chapter 3, verse 9, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to" – What? – "repentance." Dear friend, may I say to you this that in that verse repentance is a synonym for what? Salvation. There can be no believing without repentance. There can be no salvation without repentance. Repentance is a synonym. It is an element within the saving work of God that is so essential that the saving work of God can actually be called repentance, turning.

There are other invitations in the New Testament that call for this without using the word. For example, look at Mark 8:34; and here the Lord Jesus is giving an invitation. He summoned the multitude to gather together with the already present disciples, and He said to that great congregation, that multitude of people, "If anyone wishes to come after Me" – you want to be My disciple, you want to follow Me – "let him deny himself, and take up his cross" – that is, willingness to die, giving his life – "and follow Me." Now, that is a call for turning; turning away from self, turning away from sin, turning to Christ. Look at Luke chapter 9, and again just two verses there, 23, same thought, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it." That's an invitation. That's an invitation to a sinner to turn from controlling his own life to follow Christ.

You say, "Are you sure that's spoken to sinners? You sure He's not telling an already saved person to deny himself, take up his cross and be a more devout follower? You sure He's not saying you might die in chastening if you don't give up your life? Are you sure He's talking to unbelievers?" Well, from verse 25 we know, because He says immediately, "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?" Or in the Authorized, "Loses his own" – What? - "soul." He's talking about whether you're going to lose your soul or not, not whether you're going to lose your reward or your blessing. So this is a call to turn from a self-directed life, a self-indulgent life, a sinful life to follow Christ. Chapter 14 of Luke, verse 26, "If anyone comes to Me, and doesn't hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he can't

be My disciple." What a statement. And then He follows up, "Whoever doesn't carry his own cross and come after Me can't be My disciple." There's a price. It's a turning. It's a turning from your own will, your own way, the things that hold you, the relationships that confine you, to follow Christ at all costs.

And you better count the cost, verse 28, "Which one of you when he wants to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise when he's laid a foundation, not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him saying, 'The man began to build and wasn't able to finish.' Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down, take counsel whether he's strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace." So follow this: "Therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who doesn't give up" – What? – "all his possessions." My! It's a turning; it's a turning from your own life, your own will, your own way, your own sin, to follow at all cost. It is a change of mind. It is a change of heart. It is a new life of denying self and sin, and seeing the Savior as Lord and King in self's place. How important is it to repent? Jesus said it, we just read it, Luke 13:3 and 5, "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

Beloved, from just that brief look at the gospels and the Acts, a verse out of Romans and 2 Peter, we can see that the early preachers preached repentance. And I've asked the Lord to give me a new dose of repentance in my preaching, because the subject has been so ignored, tragically ignored. Where is that kind of preaching today? Where do you hear that kind of evangelism today? It's not fashionable to preach a gospel that demands that people give up all their possessions. The gospel you hear today is, "Come to Jesus and you'll be rich." The gospel today is, "Believe in Jesus and He'll forgive all your sin and give you heaven, and you don't have to worry about giving up anything." That's not what Jesus preached. "Repent, turn from your sin and your selfishness." Now, how in the world did this essential element of gospel preaching become avoided? Where did we lose it? Because it isn't around; you rarely ever hear the word.

We can go back to 1937; Dr. Harry A. Ironside, great man of God, Bible teacher. Dr. Ironside in 1937 noted that the biblical doctrine of repentance was being systematically diluted by those who wished to exclude it from the gospel message – 1937, 50 years ago. Ironside said they're trying to exclude it from the gospel message. Let me quote from the book he wrote entitled *Except Ye Repent*. He was a champion for repentance, and rightly so. He wrote this: "The doctrine of repentance is the missing note in many otherwise orthodox and fundamentally sound circles today." This is not a new battle. This is an old battle. People today are preaching a gospel that says, "Well, look, just believe, don't worry about your sin, don't worry about your past, just believe, and that will all come later." Ironside fought that battle in 1937. Further, he said this. He spoke of, quote: "Professed preachers of grace who, like the antinomians of old, decry the necessity of repentance, lest it seem to invalidate the freedom of grace," and that was the core issue. There were some who said, "If you call for

repentance you're invalidating the freedom of grace, and grace is so gracious and so free you don't have to do anything but just believe." Ironside recognized in his day the dangers of an incipient easy-believism.

Further, he said, "Shallow preaching that does not grapple with the terrible fact of man's sinfulness and guilt, calling on all men everywhere to repent, results in shallow conversions. And so we have myriads of glib-tongued professers today who give no evidence of regeneration whatever. Prating of salvation by grace, they manifest no grace in their lives. Loudly declaring they are justified by faith alone, they fail to remember that faith without works is dead, and that justification by works before men is not to be ignored as though it were in contradiction to justification by faith before God." Harry Ironside in 1937 was on target, fighting the same battle. And if we go backwards from there, back into church history, we also note that the history of the church records the testimony of God's leaders regarding the essential nature of repentance. Let me take you all the way back. How about the early church Fathers, 150 A.D., okay? Fifty years after John the apostle died; that's early. Let me read you from the Second Epistle of Clement in 150 A.D.; this is what it says: "Let us not merely call Him Lord, for that will not save us. For He says, 'Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will be saved, but he who does what is right.' Thus, brothers, let us acknowledge Him by our actions. This world and the world to come are two enemies. This one means adultery, corruption, avarice, and deceit, while the other gives them up. We cannot, then, be friends of both. To get the one, we must give up the other."

That's repentance - that's repentance. That's exactly what James said: "Friendship with the world is enmity with God." You are either the friend of the world, or the friend of God, not both - that's repentance. How about Martin Luther? In 1517 Martin Luther fired the shot that's been heard around the world when he pinned to the church door at Wittenberg his Ninety-Five Theses. He postulated 95 principles that he thought the Roman Catholic Church ought to acknowledge. I don't know if you're aware of what those 95 were, but after tonight you're going to be aware of what the first three were, because here they are.

Number one, this is what was on the door at Wittenberg: "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ in saying, 'Repent ye,' meant the whole life of the faithful to be an act of repentance." Number two of his Ninety-Five Theses: "This saying cannot be understood of the sacrament of penance, i.e., of confession and absolution, which is administered by the priesthood." Three: "Yet He does not mean interior repentance only; nay, interior repentance is void if it does not produce different kinds of mortifications of the flesh." So said Martin Luther – three main points. One: repentance is a way of life. Two: it has nothing to do with church sacraments, confession, and absolution. Three: it's not just inward; it produces mortification of the flesh. Martin Luther was right on target.

Let's move to the next century, 1674. In 1674 the theological masterpiece known as the Westminster Shorter Catechism was assembled. And in that catechism, which some of you have perhaps read, or even studied if you come from a Reformed background, there's a series of questions and answers -

that's what catechetical teaching was - question and answer, question and answer, question and answer - and you taught your children the catechism, and eventually they memorized all the elements of theology. One of the questions in the Westminster Shorter Catechism is this: "What is repentance unto life?" What is repentance unto life? Answer: "Repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience." Great statement. "It is a saving grace" – that is, it comes from God – "whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience." Further, the catechism says, "Repentance unto life doth chiefly consist in two things: one, in turning from sin and forsaking it; two, in turning to God."

Then comes the next question in the catechism. "What is that turning from sin which is part of true repentance?" Answer: "The turning from sin which is a part of true repentance doth consist in two things; one: in turning from all gross sins in regard of our course and conversation; two: in a turning from all other sins in regard of our hearts and affections." In other words, it's turning from sin in what you do, and turning from sin in what you think. The next question: "Do such as truly repent of sin never return again unto the practice of the same sins which they have repented of?" Answer: "Such as have truly repented of sin do never return unto the practice of it, so as to live in a course of sin as they did before. And where any after repentance do return unto a course of sin, it is an evident sign that their repentance was not of the right kind. Some have truly repented of their sins, although they may be overtaken and surprised by temptations so as to fall into the commission of the same sins which they have repented of, yet they do not lie in them, but get up again, and with bitter grief bewail them, and return again unto the Lord." So says the Westminster Catechism.

How about the Puritans? What did they believe about repentance? Goodwin is representative of them. The British Puritan wrote this: "Where mourning" – that is, weeping – "for offending God is wanting" – or lacking – "there is no sign of any good will yet wrought in the heart to God, nor of love to Him, without which God will never accept a man." In other words, he's saying if there's no mourning over sin it's evident God hasn't worked in the heart. "Else there is no hope of amendment. God will not pardon till He sees hopes of amendment. Now until a man confesses his sin, and that with bitterness, it is a sign that he loves it. Whilst he hides it, spares it, and forsakes it not, it is sweet in his mouth, and therefore till he confess it and mourn for it, it is a sign it is not bitter to him, and so he will not forsake it. A man will never leave sin till he finds bitterness in it, and if so, then he will be in bitterness for it. And godly sorrow works repentance."

Of all the statements that I have read on the subject, the strongest one comes from Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Listen to what Spurgeon said. "There must be a true and actual abandonment of sin and a turning unto righteousness in real act and deed in everyday life. Repentance, to be sure, must be entire. How many will say, 'Sir, I will renounce this sin and the other, but there are certain darling lusts

which I must keep and hold?' Oh, sirs, in God's name let me tell you, it is not the giving up of one sin, nor 50 sins, which is true repentance. It is the solemn renunciation of every sin. If thou dost harbor one of those accursed vipers in thy heart, and dost give up every other, that one lust, like one leak in a ship, will sink thy soul. Think it not sufficient to give up thy outward vices, fancy it not enough to cut off the more corrupt sins of thy life. It is all or none which God demands. 'Repent,' says He, and when He bids you repent, He means repent of all thy sins, otherwise He can never accept thy repentance as real and genuine. All sin must be given up or else you will never have Christ. All transgression must be renounced or else the gates of heaven must be barred against you. Let us remember, then, that for repentance to be sincere, it must be entire repentance. True repentance is a turning of the heart as well as of the life. It is the giving up of the whole soul to God to be His forever and ever. It is the renunciation of the sins of the heart as well as the crimes of the life," end quote. Strong enough?

What Spurgeon is saying is and what he's reflecting is the teaching of the church through all its centuries, that the sinner beats on his breast and says, "God, be merciful to me a sinner," and is compelled to seek deliverance from all his sin, though it's not necessary that he recite every single sin. There's a desire in his heart to be freed from all of it. And Spurgeon is saying if you come to Christ and say, "I want You to be my Savior, and I want You to give me forgiveness, and I want You to promise me heaven, but there's some sins I want to keep holding onto," that's not sincere repentance. So we've looked at the Scripture, a message of repentance. We've looked at the history of the church, an affirmation of repentance. Beloved, in spite of all the scripture, and all that the history of the church reflects, there are some people who continue to declare that preaching repentance to the unsaved violates the gospel. Did you get that? They teach that preaching repentance to the unsaved violates the gospel.

For example, no less an eminent theologian than Lewis Sperry Chafer writes in volume 3, page 372, that "repentance is one of the more common features of human responsibility which are too often erroneously added to the one requirement of faith or belief." Absolutely incredible statement. Repentance is a human responsibility erroneously added to faith? It seems to me that it's interchangeable for saving faith in the biblical record. You say, "Well, where does that come from? I mean, how can a person hold that view?" Well, Chafer pointed out that in Acts 16:31, Paul did not tell the Philippian jailer to repent. He's right. You know what he said to the Philippian jailer as recorded in Scripture? "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved." Chafer says this, "Paul did not tell the Philippian jailer to repent," then he says this. That silence, he called, and I'm quoting, "an overwhelming mass of irrefutable evidence, making it clear that the New Testament does not impose repentance on the unsaved as a condition of salvation," end quote. I find it hard to understand that. What reasoning is that?

You want to know something else Paul didn't say to the Philippian jailer? He didn't say Jesus was God, according to the record of Acts 16:31. He didn't say Jesus died on a cross. He didn't say Jesus rose from the dead. You want to know something? He probably said all of that, including all there was

to say about repentance, but it was all summed up by Luke when he penned it under the inspiration of the Spirit just to give him that one statement. Because “believing” implied repentance, and the Lord Jesus Christ implies all that He is and all that He did. But to argue from silence, and cancel out every other element of repentance in the record of the New Testament and say that because it’s not there, that’s an overwhelming mass of evidence, is mind-boggling. And one popular local pastor said, “Repentance does not mean to turn from sin, nor change one’s conduct.”

Now, you see, the reason they have to say that is because they have to deal with the word “repentance.” It’s there. Another well-known teacher of the Bible says, “Repentance means to change one’s mind, not one’s life.” Aha, now we’re getting close to the issue. Because you’re asking yourself, “How in the world can people say repentance isn’t an element if it just says ‘repent, repent, repent’ all the time?” And what you have to understand is they redefine repentance. And what they say is that repentance means to change your mind about who Jesus is – nothing more. Repentance is a change of mind about who Christ is; has nothing to do with turning from sin, has nothing to do with abandoning self-rule. It is utterly devoid of the recognition of personal guilt. It has no element of intention to obey God. It has no element of an intention or a desire for true righteousness. It’s just to change your mind about who Jesus is. You say, “Well, what in the world do they do with things like Jesus saying, ‘If you want to come after Me, you have to deny yourself, take up your cross, follow Me?’ What do they do with the words of Jesus, ‘You have to hate your father, your mother, your sister, brother,’ and so forth, and so forth, and so forth?” What do they do? They say, “Oh, all of that is directed to people that are already saved, and that’s calling them to the highest level of spiritual commitment.”

That doesn’t fly, folks, because it’s in that very passage that He said, “What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own” - What? He’s talking about your eternal soul. But they then have to take every one of Jesus’ statements that call people to total commitment, to abandon everything to follow Him, and make them statements directed at already-saved people, calling them to the higher life. And so they conclude that when Jesus called someone to be a disciple, He was calling a believer to a second level, and a Christian is one thing and a disciple is another. And next Sunday night we’re going to talk about what is a disciple, and deal with that issue. But they say, “Yes, you repent in the fact that you change your mind about who Jesus is. It has nothing to do with turning from sin. It has nothing to do with abandoning self- rule. It has no recognition of personal guilt, no intent to obey God, and no desire for true righteousness.” And I submit to you that that is not what Jesus intended by repentance.

The gospel call of Jesus was a call to forsake sin as much as it was a summons to believe in Him. It was a call to turn from sin. From His first message to His last, the Savior’s theme was calling sinners to turn from their sin, to embrace God, to pursue righteousness. It was not only that they had a new perspective on who He was, but that they turned from sin to follow Him. And Luke, as we noted in chapter 24 and verse 47, said that when you go to preach, Jesus said, “Preach repentance for

forgiveness of sins." And if you're coming to Christ for forgiveness of sins, the thing that leads to it is what? Repentance. By the way, Luke is the only gospel writer who gives the content of the message that is inherent in the Great Commission. The other writers just give the Commission, "Go and preach." Luke says, "This is what you preach: repentance which leads to the forgiveness of sins." And so repentance is always linked to sin. It's not just changing your mind about who Jesus is. "Oh, I thought He was a man; now I know He's God." Not just that. It implies turning from sin.

Let me give you an illustration. Look at Luke 18 - Luke 18, verse 9. It's a parable, a parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, viewed others with contempt, Pharisees namely. "Two men went into the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, the other a tax gatherer. The Pharisee stood, was praying, says to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I'm not like other people, swindlers, unjust, adulterers, even like this tax gatherer. I fast twice a week. I pay tithes of all I can get.'" He was there confessing to God his what? His righteousness. Yeah. Let me ask you a question? Did he believe in God? Did the Pharisee believe in God? Yes. Did he have faith in God? Yes. Was he saved? No. Why? Because his faith was devoid of what? Of repentance. See, that's a classic illustration of the fact that here is a man who believed in God. Here is a man who is devoted to God. Here is a man who went into the temple to pray to the God he believed in. But where there was no repentance in the heart, there was no relationship. He was a fraud. The tax gatherer, standing over there pounding on his breast, crying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner." Jesus said, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." That first guy never knew salvation. He was a believer who didn't repent. The second guy was an unbeliever who repented. He was a spiritual and religious outcast, but he repented. And inherent in that, of course, was the expression of faith. You cannot take repentance and strip it of its moral implications.

Now, let me give you a quick definition, okay? All of that introduction comes down to what we're talking about. What is the biblical definition of repentance, okay? Let me give you a few thoughts and then we'll wrap it up. What is biblically defined repentance? Number one: it's an element within saving faith. It is an element within saving faith. In fact, it can be used as an expression interchangeably with saving faith. Now, we are to preach repentance. We're to call men to repentance. That means to saving faith. It's so inherent it can be used as a synonym for saving faith. You can call on someone and say, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." Or you could call and say, "Repent of your sin and embrace Christ." Same thing. It is simply all that salvation is. But let me make this very clear. It is not a synonym in the purest sense for "believe" because it doesn't mean the same. It is inherent in believing, and believing is inherent in repentance, so that the terms can be used interchangeably, but each of those terms expresses a unique element. Believing expresses just that – trust, confidence, faith. Repentance expresses turning from sin toward God. "They are complementary parts of the same process," said Berkhof in his *Systematic Theology*.

Now, the Greek word is *metanoia*, and, you know, it comes from two words, *meta*, "after," and *noe*, "to understand," and it means "an afterthought." So if you just took those words and put them

together, it would mean an afterthought or a change of mind. And some of these people who want to say repentance is nothing more than changing your mind about who Jesus is, say, “You see, that’s what *metanoia* means. But listen, folks, that is something that you see often done with Greek words that’s so unfair. Not every word is necessarily the sum of its separate parts. Because *meta* means this and *noia* means this, when you put them together it doesn’t necessarily mean what those two parts mean. Often it does; often it doesn’t. I’ll illustrate it in English, okay? We have a word in English “independent,” right? Now if you push that too far you could say, “I know what that means, that means ‘in de pen there is a dent.’” No, it doesn’t mean that. It doesn’t mean “in de pen there is a dent,” because in English, in English every word is not necessarily the sum of all its parts. It’s true in Greek. You’ve got to go deeper than that. And the biblical meaning is much deeper than that. *Metanoia* is used in the New Testament always – now mark this – it always embodies more than the literal meaning of its component terms. It always speaks of a change of purpose and it specifically always speaks of a turning from sin.

One of the helpful tools that we use in studying the Greek language is Colin Brown’s work - massive tome, this big, three volumes. In the section on conversion by Goetzmann, volume 1, page 358, he’s dealing with *metanoia*, and this, of course, from a very scholarly perspective. And this is a quote: “The predominantly intellectual understanding of *metanoia* as a change of mind plays very little part in the New Testament. Rather, the decision by the whole man to turn around is stressed. It is clear that we are concerned neither with a purely outward turning, nor with a merely intellectual change of ideas.” So says the best of scholarship. In the sense that Jesus used it, repentance incorporated a repudiation of the old life, and a turning to God for salvation. The other number one source for understanding all there is about Greek words was produced by Kittel. Colin Brown is this big; Kittel is this big. Every significant New Testament word is there in an exhaustive treatment. Let me read you what Behm says, writing on *metanoia* in Gerhard Kittel. Quote: “The term demands radical conversion, demands a transformation of nature, a definitive turning from evil, a resolute turning to God in total obedience. This conversion is once for all. There can be no going back, only advance and responsible movement along the way now taken. It affects the whole man; first and basically, the center of personal life, then logically his conduct at all times and in all situations, his thoughts, words and acts. The whole proclamation of Jesus is a proclamation of unconditional turning to God, of unconditional turning from all that is against God, not merely that which is downright evil, but that which in a given case makes total turning to God impossible,” end quote.

That’s how they understand it from the technical side, the meaning of the word. This would be supported, wouldn’t it, from 1 Thessalonians 1:9; do you remember that verse? Look at it. First Thessalonians 1:9, here is a chronicle of the elements of repentance. The second half of the verse, Paul reminds the Thessalonians “how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.” Three elements of repentance, they’re right there. One: turning to God. Two: turning from evil. Three: serving God. You turned to God from idols, and all that’s evil with them, to serve God. Three elements of repentance: turning to God from evil to serve God. Beautiful summary. No - listen to me -

no change of mind about who Jesus is can save until those three elements are present - turning from sin, to God, to serve Him. Repentance is an element within saving faith.

Second point, it involves a redirection of the will, it involves a redirection of the will. Thayer's Greek lexicon defines *metanoe* as, quote: "The change of mind of those who have begun to abhor their errors and misdeeds, and have determined to enter upon a better course of life, so that it embraces both a recognition of sin, and sorrow for it, and hearty amendment, the tokens and effects of which are good deeds," end quote. In other words, it's a redirection of the will that results in a changed behavior. It's not merely sorrow for sin, although genuine repentance always has sorrow. It is a redirection of the human will. It is a choice to forsake all unrighteousness and pursue holiness. And please, beloved, it is that redirection of the will that is the work of God. We're not talking about something you do; we're talking about God doing something in you when He saves you. People say, "Well, you're teaching that this is some pre-salvation work, and until you clean your life up and repent, you can't get saved." No, repentance is not a pre-salvation attempt to get your life cleaned up. It is not a call to stop sinning so you can get saved. Not at all. It is not just an invitation to turn your back on all evil so Christ will accept you. It is the thing which God produces in you when He saves you. It's an element of saving faith that redirects the will.

J.I. Packer, in his helpful little book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God,* writes, "The repentance that Christ requires of His people consists in a settled refusal to set any limit to the claims which He may make on their lives." It's not just a mental activity. There's an intellectual aspect, let me give you this quickly. There's an intellectual aspect. Repentance involves recognition of sin, recognition of the sinfulness of sin, recognition that sin affronts a holy God. It involves the intellectual recognition that I'm personally responsible for my sin and my guilt. It includes the recognition that Christ died for my sin, and that He, as God, wants to rule my life. That's the intellectual part of repentance. Secondly, it has an emotional part. That recognition produces sorrow, it produces new desires and new impulses, it produces shame. And 2 Corinthians 7:10 says there is a sorrow that leads to repentance. So it starts out, you see that sin is sinful, you see that you are guilty, you see that Christ has provided intellectually, and then it touches your emotions, and there's a brokenness, and a sorrow, and a shame, and a guilt that pours out; and out of that sorrow comes the third element, and that is the volitional - the volitional. Finally, repentance enacts the will, and brings a change of direction, a new determination to abandon stubborn disobedience and surrender your life to Christ. And then it produces a changed behavior. Where there's no changed behavior, repentance may have been intellectual, and it may have been emotional, but it was never volitional. It redirects the will when it's genuine.

Thirdly, and as a result, it's life-changing. It's life-changing. It's an element of saving faith, it activates the will, redirects it, and it's life-changing. That's why John said, "Bring forth fruit meet for repentance." You say you repent; let's see your life. Demonstrate it. Real repentance alters the character of a person. One of my heroes, the men that I esteem highly, is Martyn Lloyd-Jones. One of

the books that's blessed me that he wrote has to do with the Sermon on the Mount. In it, he writes this – he's now with the Lord – "Repentance means that you realize that you are a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God, that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that you are hell-bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called sin is in you, and that you long to get rid of it, and that you turn your back on it in every shape and form. You renounce the world, whatever the cost, the world in its mind and outlook, as well as its practices, and you deny yourself and take up the cross, and go after Christ. Your nearest and dearest, and the whole world, may call you a fool, or say you have religious mania; you may have to suffer financially, but it makes no difference. That is repentance."

It becomes an ongoing way of life. The repentance that begins at salvation starts a progressive, life-long process of confession of sin. First John 1:9, we go on confessing our sin. The active, continuous attitude of repentance produces the poverty of spirit, the mourning, the meekness that characterizes true believers in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5. Repentance produces a new way of life, not just a different opinion about Christ - a new way of life. Those who heard Jesus preach knew what He was calling for, believe me. The Jews knew exactly what He was calling for. He wasn't asking them just to change their opinion about Him. They knew what Isaiah said. When Isaiah preached, what did he preach? Isaiah 1:16, this is what Isaiah preached, "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, remove the evil of your deeds from My sight, cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice. And then though your sins be as scarlet they shall be" – What? – "white as snow. Though they're red like crimson, they'll be like wool, if you wash yourselves, if you make yourselves clean."

The progression begins internally and then manifests itself in attitudes and actions. The end of Isaiah, or near the end, chapter 55, we find the same kind of call. Two verses, rich verses on this matter of repentance - I don't know how they overlook these. "Seek the Lord while He may be found," Isaiah 55:6, "call upon Him while He is near." How do I do that? "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man forsake his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." He'll pardon when the wicked forsakes his way, and the unrighteous man forsakes his thoughts, and turns to the Lord.

That familiar text, often misused, and perhaps too frequently avoided, 2 Chronicles 7:14: "And My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin." When they turn, when they repent - and I'll tell you, when John the Baptist preached repentance, nobody missed it, they knew what he said, and they knew exactly what he meant.

Where are the fruits? Prove your repentance by your life. And what are the fruits of repentance? Simply righteous deeds, holy deeds, godly deeds, transformed life. In Luke 3, we have the record of that very account of which I just quoted, where the Pharisees came and approached again, as often they did, John the Baptist - always wanting to parade their piousity - and John says to them, in verse

7 of Luke 3, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” What are you doing here, you snakes? “Bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance,” he says. Where are those fruits? What are they? Verse 10: “The multitudes said, ‘What do we do?’” What should we do? What are the fruits of repentance? He says, “‘Let the man who has two tunics share with him who has none; let him who has food do likewise.’ Some tax gatherers came to be baptized. They said, ‘Teacher, what do we do?’” What are the fruits of repentance? “‘Collect no more than what you’ve been ordered to.’ Some of the soldiers came and said, ‘What do we do?’ And He said, ‘Don’t take money from anyone by force or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with what your wages are.’” Pretty practical stuff, right?

You want to know where true repentance shows up? In the character of your daily living. Do you give your cloak to one who doesn’t have one? Do you make sure you don’t take anything from anyone that you don’t deserve? You don’t force people. You don’t accuse people falsely. Are you content with whatever your wages are? That’s where the genuineness of your repentance shows up. That’s pretty mundane stuff, folks. And, beloved, I submit to you that no message that doesn’t press for repentance can properly be called the gospel. Conversion to Jesus is more than a break with an old thought pattern; it’s a new life - it’s a new life. Behm says, writing again in Kittel’s volumes, “To be converted embraces all that the dawn of God’s Kingdom demands of man, a changed life.” And please understand, I don’t think that anyone could miss my heart on this, this is not something you do so you can get yourself saved; this is something God’s Spirit produces in you in saving you. That’s why it says, and we’ve been reading it in 2 Timothy, and this is an essential passage for us to grasp, chapter 2, verse 25, “that God may grant them repentance.” It’s a gift of God. It’s a gift of God. Acts 11 verse 18 that “God has granted repentance to the Gentiles.” It’s a gift of God.

Let me close with this last passage, Matthew 21:28. Turn to it, please. So much to say. Matthew 21:28, “What do you think?”, Jesus said. Think this one through with me, will you? “A man had two sons. He came to the first, said, ‘Son, go work today in the vineyard.’ And he answered and said, ‘I will, sir,’ and he didn’t go.” You got a son like that? “He came to the second” - he said the same thing - “He said, ‘I will not.’ Afterward, regretted what he said and went. ‘Which of the two did the will of his father?’ The crowd said, ‘The latter.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, tax gatherers and harlots will get into the Kingdom of God before you.’”

Potent, my friend. Jesus describes two kinds of people – you ready for this? People who pretend to be obedient, but are actually rebels in their heart; they pretend to be obedient, but they’re rebels in their heart. And people who begin as rebels, but do what? Repent. He told it for the benefit of the Pharisees, who pretended to be obedient to God, but were rebels in their hearts. And then there were the harlots and the tax gatherers, who started out as rebels, but repented. There’s no salvation apart from repentance. Let’s bow together in prayer.

I’m reminded, Lord, tonight of the words of James, “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.” Father, give us an understanding of the call to repentance. My prayer right now is for anyone here who has pretended to be obedient, but in the heart is a rebel; who says to God, “I will go” and does not. O God, transform that life, bring true repentance. And I would pray tonight also for the tax gatherers and the harlots, the outcasts, the rebels who live in open rebellion against You, but are open to repentance. Move their hearts. Work that mighty, gracious work of repentance in every needful life, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

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