

## The Doctrine of Repentance

Selected Scriptures

90-288

Well we are in the midst of a, I suppose, a bit of an eclectic study of doctrine with no particular sequence in view, other than to touch on the great doctrines of our faith. One such doctrine which is certainly under siege these days is the doctrine of repentance...the doctrine of repentance, what the Bible teaches about repentance. This has long been a concern for me that surfaced, first of all, some years ago when I wrote a book called *The Gospel According to Jesus* in which I called for a restoration of the doctrine of repentance to the gospel that's being preached. I followed that up with a second book then called *Faith Works*, and retitled *The Gospel According to the Apostles*, which was my original title which again addressed the issue of repentance going beyond the gospels and into the epistles of the New Testament to see the importance of this...of this doctrine, this critical component in God's divine work in the souls of men and women.

One of the clearest elements of the invitation to salvation on the pages of Scripture is the issue of repentance. And a good place to start is a text to which we referred this morning. Turn, if you will, to the fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, Isaiah 55, really just a launch point by way of reminder. Isaiah 55 verses 6 and 7, and here we have an invitation to salvation that incorporates repentance, without using the word it describes it. "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man 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."

Seeking the Lord is important, calling upon Him is critical, but so is forsaking wicked ways and unrighteous thoughts. It is impossible to talk about seeking the Lord without talking about turning from sin. It is impossible to talk about turning to the Lord without turning away from iniquity and wickedness. Clearly this is an essential in the gospel message.

Let me help you a little bit with that. Go to the New Testament, let's look at Matthew chapter 3, and I want to give you kind of a fast look at critical Scriptures just to plant in your mind the importance of this doctrine. John the Baptist came in Matthew 3 verse 1, preaching. And this is what he preached, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent. And this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet saying, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight.'" If you're going to receive the Lord and the salvation He brings, you're going to have to straighten out. You're going to have to make a way for the Lord. We looked at that this morning as it's indicated from the lips of John the Baptist in Luke chapter 3 where he quotes the extended portion of Isaiah 40 verses 3 and 4 about lifting up the low places, lowering the high places, straightening the crooked places and cleaning the rough places. There is some heart work to be done in order to enter the Kingdom. That was the message of John the Baptist. Down in verse 8 he then adds, "Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance." Demonstrate that your repentance is real.

In the fourth chapter of Matthew Jesus began to preach and say, just as John had said, "Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." Salvation is near. We talked about that this morning, salvation and the Kingdom, Kingdom of God, Kingdom of heaven, same thing, virtually the same. Salvation and the Kingdom are the same. Salvation is at hand if you repent.

We find this note sounded repeatedly in the ministry of our Lord, as well. In the ninth chapter of Matthew verse 12, Jesus said, "It's not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means. I desire compassion and not sacrifice. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." And the other gospels add, "To repentance." He has come to call sinners to repentance, and that will show up in the other gospels.

Just to parallel that, Mark 1:14, again the emphasis is clearly John preaching and then John being taken into custody in Mark 1:14, Jesus comes into Galilee preaching the gospel of God, the good news from heaven, the good news of God. What is it? "The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel." Repent and believe in the gospel. We talk a lot about believing, we don't talk a lot about repentance. But this is absolutely critical. In the second chapter of Mark again this message comes through as I read you earlier in Matthew, here Mark adds this account to his own record, "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...same statement repeated there as we read in Matthew. In the sixth chapter of Mark and the twelfth verse, here we find the Twelve, the Apostles sent out to preach and they went out, Mark 6:12, and preached that men should repent. That, of course, is the mandate.

And remember Luke, if you will, for just a moment. Luke 5:31 and 32, because this same emphasis is made there. In Luke 5:31 Jesus said, "It's not those who are well who need a physician, those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners...and here it comes...to repentance." John called people to repent. Jesus called people to repent. The Apostles called people to repent.

Now let's go to 13 in Luke, a familiar chapter to us now because we've been dealing with it for some weeks. In Luke 13 do you remember in verse 3? "I tell you no, unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Luke 13:5, "I tell you no, unless you repent you will all likewise perish." There is no salvation apart from repentance. Go to the fifteenth chapter and again verse 10, Luke 15:10, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." The sixteenth chapter, the thirtieth verse, "No, Father Abraham, if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent. But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.'" And that, of course, was in the fascinating story about Lazarus in Abraham's bosom and the rich man shut out. But the issue was always about repentance. Now go to the end of Luke's gospel and we'll give you previews of what we some day may learn. Luke 24, no guarantee, verse 47, well let's go back to verse 46, "It is written that Christ should suffer, rise again from the dead again the third day." That's the gospel. "And that repentance for forgiveness of sin should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem."

What are we supposed to proclaim? Repentance...repentance. It's been fascinating to me through the years in visiting countries in former Communist Russia to meet the believers there and to come to some understanding of their unique Christian vocabulary. And one of the things they say when they talk about their salvation is, "I repented...I repented." They don't say, "I was saved, I was born again." They say, "I repented. I repented when I was such-and-such an age, I repented when I heard this, I repented...the preachers say, 'Do any of you desire to repent? Please come forward and

repent." First time I was ever there, first time I preached, it was fascinating. I preached a rather prolonged sermon in Kiev in the Ukraine and the place was packed, the people were outside looking through the window and it was very cold but they stood there for hours. It was soon after the Freedoms had come, there was tremendous interest in the gospel and the pastor after I was finished preaching said, "Pull it together and call for people to repent and then I'll come up and we'll invite people to repent." And he did. He came up after I had preached. I think it was 11:30 in the morning by the time I had finished, and he said, "If you desire to repent, please come to the front." I wasn't sure what that meant but people began coming to the front. When they came to the front, the pastor handed them a microphone and said, "Repent." That's right, so they took the microphone and they repented publicly. And as I remember it, and I think it's pretty accurate, after each person repented, there was rejoicing and they sang a verse of a hymn and that went on till 1:30, two hours of people repenting because they understand what the Bible means by what the Bible says. It's about repentance.

Look at the book of Acts chapter 2 verse 38. Peter said to them...now we're post-resurrection, post-ascension, the gospel is now in the hands of the Apostles and the believers. Peter said to them, "Repent, repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Chapter 3 verse 19, "Repent, therefore, and return that your sins may be wiped away in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." The message is obviously going to be the same, the same Holy Spirit, the same gospel, the same call to repentance. You find it even in chapter 11 where they are somewhat surprised that God has granted to the Gentiles, listen, the repentance that leads to life. Spiritual life comes by way of turning from sin, as well as turning to God. And in chapter 17 Paul preaching that wonderful sermon in the midst of the Areopagus to the Athenians in verse 30, says, "God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent in view of the day of judgment." Again the message very clearly is a message of repentance.

And then in one final one in the book of Acts, Acts 20:20 Paul says he taught publicly and from house to house, and what did he teach? "Solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, that's not the only reference, by the way, in the book of Acts to repentance, but sufficient, I think.

When you come in to the book of Romans, there is a strong emphasis on repentance by the Apostle Paul. For example, chapter 2 verse 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?" In fact, you could even refer to salvation as repentance, that's the way they do it, as I said, among Russian believers and others. And you remember the words of Peter in 2 Peter 3:9, "God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

Now I think all of that is simply to say repentance is a critical matter. It is an essential part of the saving work of God. It is a call for a turning from sin. If I were to just pull together the basic linguistic *metanoia*, is the word, linguistic treatments of that word, that predominant word, and some of the theological things that have been used to describe the meaning of that word, this is what you would come up with. Here's a basic understanding of what repentance means. It is by all those who define both the word and its theological meaning, a radical turning, a radical conversion, a transformation of nature, a definitive turning from evil, a resolute turning from evil toward God, a commitment to move from unrighteousness to righteousness, from disobedience to obedience. And this conversion is once

for all. There can be, says one writer, no going back, only advance in responsible movement along the way now taken. It is a life-altering event, this repentance. It affects the whole man. First and basically it affects the center of personal life, then logically from the center it begins to impact all the conduct and the thought life, all situations, all actions. The whole proclamation of Jesus then is a proclamation of a once-for-all, complete, unconditional turning from sin to God...unconditional from all that is against God to all that honors Him. It is not just turning from what we could say is a downright wickedness, it is even turning from those things that are not God-honoring. It is total surrender. It is total commitment to the will of God and the Word of God. It embraces the whole life of a person. One writer says it embraces the whole walk of the new man who is claimed by the divine Lordship. It carries with it the founding of a new personal relation between a man and God. It awakens joyous obedience for a life lived according to God's will.

It is not just to change your mind about who Jesus is. It is not just to change your mind about your circumstances and decide to try something else. It is a whole new life that emerges out of self-denial. It is to deny yourself and your sin and to commit yourself unreservedly to Christ. Its importance, unless you repent, Jesus said, you'll perish...you'll perish. But I have noticed for years this is not a fashionable thing to preach because it's not easily accepted. Again going back, and history teaches us so much, this morning I read you a quote from A.W. Pink from 1937. Well rummaging around that era is a very interesting thing to do and I found an equally interesting quote from Dr. Henry Ironsides in 1937 and Ironsides noted that biblical...the biblical doctrine of repentance was being diluted by those who wish to exclude it from the gospel message. Nothing new...nothing new. This is what Ironsides wrote, he wrote a book in '37 called Except You Repent, he said this, "The Doctrine of Repentance is the missing note in many otherwise orthodox and fundamentally sound circles today." And that could be repeated today. There is always going to be a battle for the true gospel. I've said it again and again, there's always going to be a battle to hold the standard where God has established the standard in the Scriptures and repentance is going to be a point of that fight. Ironsides went on to speak of professed preachers of grace who like the antinomians of old decry the necessity of repentance, lest it seem to invalidate the freedom of grace. Some people think that if you call people to repent, as we were talking about this morning, if you call them to struggle and to agonize in the battle for their souls with God, if you call them to do that, somehow this works. In fact, Ironsides even said, "This unwillingness to preach repentance is an incipient easy believism." That's not new, that's old. In fact, the history of the church records the testimony of God's leaders at the very outset. Go back to 150, go back to the second epistle of Clement, 150 A.D., all right? This would be 50 years or more, or 55 years after John wrote the Apocalypse and the Canon was closed. He said this, "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, you must give up the other." That's what repentance is. It is essentially saying to adultery, corruption, avarice and deceit, I give you up. That was then the battle and it's always been.

Well let's jump somewhere in between. How about Martin Luther? How about Martin Luther, 1500's? Ninety-Five Thesis he puts on the door of the church at Wittenberg, 1517 is the year, Ninety-Five Thesis, here are the first three. Number one, this is what he said the Bible demanded. "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ in saying repent meant the whole life of the faithful to be an act of repentance." The second of the Ninety-five, "This saying cannot be understood of a sacrament of Penance, i.e., of confession and absolution which is administered by the priesthood, that is to say you can't grant somebody absolution from their sin instead of them repenting." And, of course, you know the Indulgences and the Absolutions were the horrific thing that caused the whole Protestant

Reformation, that people were so beleaguered by having to pay money to buy Indulgences and to go through all of these rituals and routines which impoverished them in order to purchase Penance as a substitute for repentance and be delivered from their sin. The abuses of the system upon them made them ripe for a revolution and all Martin Luther had to do was show up and articulate what the people felt and it happened.

Third of the Ninety-Five, "Yet He does not mean interior repentance only, nay, interior repentance is void if it does not produce different kinds of mortification of the flesh." In other words, it better show up in a broken and a contrite heart and in a life where the flesh is being killed. So Luther launches the Reformation on the doctrine of true heartfelt, life-changing repentance. He says the whole life of the faithful is an act of repentance. You stop going the direction you're going, you turn, you go completely away from sin toward God. As Reformed theology began to be refined and show up in creedal form, you have 1674, the Westminster Shorter Catechism and it asks...catechizes by asking question and giving answers, some of you have had that experience, a wonderful way to learn. One of the questions in the Shorter Catechism is, "What is repentance unto life? What is repentance unto life?" The answer comes, "Repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner out of 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." Boy, I'm telling you, those Westminster authors really worked their words to say it all. It is when the sinner doth with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it unto God. It went on to say, "Repentance unto life doth chiefly consist in two things. One, in turning from sin and forsaking it; two, in turning to God." And you can't have one without the other. You can just call people to believe in Jesus, pray a prayer, invite Jesus into their life unless there's a clear understanding that they are turning from sin.

Another question or two come out of the...comes out of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Question number 15 says, "What is that turning from sin which is part of true repentance?" And the answer comes, "The turning from sin which is part of true repentance doth consist in two things. One, in a 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." It touches everything.

And then question number 16 in the catechism asks, "Do such as truly repent of sin never return again unto the practice of the same sins which they have repented of?" Answer, "One, such as truly repented sin do never return to 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. Two, 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 turn again unto the Lord."

That is great theology hammered out from profound understanding of Scripture by great and gifted men in the Westminster Catechism. Great British Puritan, Thomas Goodwin, wrote, "Where mourning...he said...for offending God is lacking, there is no sign of any good will wrought in the heart to God, nor of love to Him without which God will never accept a man." Did you get that? Where mourning...m-o-u-r-n-i-n-g, for offending God is lacking, there's no sign of any good will yet wrought in the heart toward God. He went on to say, "Else there is no hope of amendment. God will not pardon till He sees hopes of amendment, until He sees the sinner longing to change. Now until a man confess his sin and that with bitterness, it is a sign he still loves it. While he hides it, spares it and forsakes it not, it is still sweet in his mouth and therefore until he confess it and mourn for it, it is

a sign it is not bitter to him, so he will not forsake it. A man will never leave sin until he finds bitterness in it and if so, he will be in bitterness for it and godly sorrow will work repentance."

Moving a little later in history from Thomas Godwin, we come to Charles Spurgeon. He says it as strongly and usually as well as can be said. Listen to what Spurgeon said. "There must be a true and actual abandonment of sin and a turning unto righteousness in a 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.' O 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 complete renunciation of every sin. If thou doest 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 your 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 that 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 is real or genuine. All sin must be given up or else you shall 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." And he closes with these words, "True repentance is a turning of the heart, as well as 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.

See, everybody understood this the same way. The great stream of historic Christian faith understood it. It was uniformly understood. Really, until the last century, until my lifetime when you read things, for example, in the theology of Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder of Dallas Seminary who listed repentance as, quote: "One of the more common features of human responsibility which are too often erroneously added to the one requirement of faith." So he said repentance is a erroneously added element to faith. If you happen to have a copy of the very excellent Ryrie Study Bible, you will find a statement in the back on repentance and it says, "Repentance is a false addition to faith." How can you say that? How can that possibly be the conclusion you draw from Scripture?

From His first message to His last, the Savior's theme was calling sinners to turn from their sin and repentance and turn to God in faith.

It wasn't just about getting a new perspective on themselves, on their life. It wasn't about getting a new perspective on Christ. It was about turning from sin to follow Him. That's why, as I quoted earlier, Luke 24:47 says, "You have to go throughout the whole world and preach repentance." That's the great commission, preach repentance, calling for people to turn from sin. I mean, it's pretty clear, I think, that the Pharisees believed in God. The Pharisees longed to know God, to serve God. But they were utterly unwilling to repent. The rich young ruler wanted eternal life, but he was not willing to repent. So repentance can never be redefined in such a way as to strip it of its moral ramifications.

Now let's just consider a couple of things about repentance. We just set the stage there. Number one, in giving a biblical definition to this great doctrine, we have to understand that repentance is an element within saving faith. It is an element within saving faith. It is not another word for believing. There are a lot of folks who would like us to think it's just another word for believing. To say to someone to repent simply means to stop not believing and start believing, to repent of not believing and start believing, so that it's really another word for faith. While it is not another word for faith, the two are complimentary parts of the same reality. As the great theologian Louis Burkhoﬀ(?), says,

they are part of the same reality. The Greek word *metanoia* from *meta* which is after, and *noi* which is to understand, literally means an afterthought or a change of mind. But it's not just a change of mind, the biblical meaning is a lot more than the word itself. It always in its usage in the New Testament embodies far more than just changing your mind, it is, as we have already seen, a change of everything in your life, everything. It really is a conversion, a hundred and eighty degrees. Jesus is calling for a repudiation of the old, that's why He said, "Deny yourself." A complete repudiation of the old sinful life, turning away from sin and turning toward God. In 1 Thessalonians, and it's not really described here, it's just stated as to what it is, 1 Thessalonians 1:9, here Paul is defining the true salvation of the Thessalonian believers and in verse 9 he says, "You turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven." You turned to God, you turned from idols, you turned from evil, you turned in order to stop serving sin and start serving God. So it is then, first of all, an element within saving faith, but it's not just the same as faith. It's a component of faith because in order to truly turn to God in faith you have to turn from sin or the turning is a sham.

Secondly, it is a redirection of the will. Just to give you another thought to add. It is an essential element of saving faith, it's a component of it, not the same, but it is a redirection of the will. In that I want to say this, look there are some people who have the idea that repentance is feeling sorry. Okay? It's feeling bad. Sometimes you hear about a person who fell into terrible sin and somebody will say, "But, you know, they're very repentant." How do you know they're repentant? "Oh, they were crying and they were so sad and so grieved." That is not how you define repentance. That is not godly repentance. That is...that is a kind of sorrow but not necessarily godly sorrow. Real repentance is not remorse, real repentance is not just some emotion, some sentiment, some sense of loss, some agony over the effect of your sin, it is a redirection of the will. So it involves faith, it is a part of it, turning from sin and fully trusting in the Lord. But it is also the redirection of the will and not just remorse. It is a purposeful choice to forsake all unrighteousness and pursue righteousness in its place.

Let me give you an illustration of it. Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 7, and this provides a very full illustration of this. Second Corinthians chapter 7, we'll just look at verse 9 and then I want you to look more importantly at verses 10 and 11. Second Corinthians 7:9, "I know rejoice that you...not that you were made sorrowful," that's not enough, but this is often the standard people use. "Well, the person is so broken hearted, he's got to be truly repentant, they're so sad, they're so upset."

"I rejoice not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance." Repentance is something beyond sorrow. "You were made sorrowful according to the will of God." And what does that look like? What does real repentance look like? What does Godly sorrow look like? For that we look at verse 10. "The sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret." Wow, that's the first thing. That is the real deal, repentance that never changes. It's what all those quotes I gave you were saying, it's a once and for all in life and you never look back, and you never turn back, and you never go back, and there's no regret. There are many times, listen, when people are caught up in sin and caught up in guilt, and caught up in shame, and caught up in sorrow, and caught up in remorse by their sins and they make these grandiose statements that, "I'm not going to do that anymore and I just want to confess my sin and I want to set the record straight. I'm going to honor the Lord and I don't want this anymore." And all they're doing is feeling the weight of the suffering that's come upon them because of the choices they made, but it isn't very long before all those desires and longings come back and they regret that they ever made that repentance and they want to go back. But the true repentance is a repentance without regret. That is a repentance to salvation. All the sorrow of the world does is produce death.

You can be sorry and you can be very sorry, remorseful, even despairing about the agonies that have come upon you because of your sin and still die in your sin without salvation. We're talking here about the kind of repentance that leads to salvation being a real turning with no regret, never looking back.

And he goes on to define it in verse 11. It produces earnestness. "What earnestness," what is that? An eagerness for righteousness, an eagerness for righteousness. This very thing, this godly sorrow, he says, has produced this earnestness in you, this new soberness, this new eagerness to pursue what is right. And then he says, secondly, "What vindication," *apologia*, from which we get the word apologetic, it's a speech in defense. What it really means is a strong desire to clear your name...a strong desire to see the stigma of sin removed to prove yourself worthy of trust, to prove the legitimacy of your faith, to prove that your confession of Christ is real. You want to make everyone know of your repentance. It's not in a corner. You want to show people that it's real. You want to be vindicated. You want to make a speech in defense of the reality of this repentance. You hold nothing back, you want the world to know. He even adds, "What indignation..." *aganaktesis*, it means to be angry. What are they angry about? Their sin. It's to be angry about sin. It's to be angry about the past. It's to be angry about the shame that it produces. What fear, what reverence, what awe of God of His holiness, of His grace, what longing, yearning for what is right, what zeal for holiness, what avenging of wrong...there is the evidence of the reality of your repentance. Truly repentant people have a strong desire to see justice done and to make restitution for the wrong that they've done and the way they've harmed people. They accept fully the consequence of their sin. That's the real deal...that's the real kind of repentance. It is a complete redirection of the will, to go along with that redirection of the mind in faith and at the same time turning from sin.

Certainly this is not some pre-salvation human work. I read you from Acts where God grants repentance. Second Timothy 2:25 says the same thing, a familiar verse, "Correcting those who are in opposition if perhaps God may grant them repentance," it's not a work added to salvation, it's a part of the saving work that God does in the heart. The call to repentance is not a call to fix up your life, to stop sinning so that you can be saved. I remember a medical doctor some years ago that I was talking to up in my office, he said, "My life is such a mess, I'm going to come to Christ but first I want to straighten out my life." I said, "Good luck." "Can the leper change his spots? Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Of course not. Neither can you who are accustomed to do evil do good." It's not about you changing your life, it's about the saving work that God does. And when He does His real saving work in the willing heart, repentance of this nature is produced. Repentance, the kind that God requires, consists in a settled...listen to this one...a settled refusal to set any limit on the claims Christ will lay on your life. You give up everything, take up the cross, even death to follow Him at any cost. This is the kind of repentance.

You are so eager to give up sin, it doesn't matter what the requirements are, it doesn't matter what He asks. And that was the problem with the rich, young ruler. He wasn't that interested in considering his sin, he didn't even want to acknowledge that he was a sinner. And I think this...this works in our will to a process. First of all, it is intellectual. It begins with a recognition of sin as an affront to a holy God. You've got to have a definition of sin, you're not going to turn from it till you understand what it is, right? So part of effectively reaching people and calling them to repentance is defining for them what sin is. It's not just some human weakness, it's just...not just being normal, etc., etc., as you like to hear people think about it today. We have to have people understand sin is a violation of the Law of God, it is an affront to a holy God. It produces personal guilt that can never be removed throughout all eternity and will require everlasting punishment for those whose sin is not covered.

And at that point you have to explain to them why Christ came, in order to bear the sins of those who would believe and to take their punishment in order that God might be just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus. It is intellectual. You've got to understand sin and you've got to understand the provision for sin that comes in Christ and the horror of sin is seen not only in the definitions of sin in the Bible, but in the death of Christ where you see what sin produced.

It is also emotional because true repentance does produce sorrow. We just read that in 2 Corinthians, it is a sorrow unto repentance, sorrow that is a true and deep sorrow that produces a salvation that is real. It is a repentance without regret. It has an earnestness to it. It has a godly sorrow in it. It has a zeal and a longing and an indignation and a desire to make things right. Sure it's emotional. It is also, and finally so, volitional. It finally brings you to a change of direction, a willingness, even a determination, to abandon sin and stubborn disobedience and surrender to the will of Christ whatever it is, whatever He asks. It wasn't that the rich, young ruler could be saved by giving all his money away. It was that that would surface whether or not his repentance was real. If he was genuinely wanting to be delivered from sin, if he had genuinely wanted to turn from sin to God, then it wouldn't have mattered what the Lord said. If the Lord said to him, "Give up everything," he would have said gladly. If the Lord had said to him, "Not only give up your money but give up your life for Me." Gladly, I want to be delivered from sin, I want to turn from sin, I want to turn toward righteousness.

So we look at this issue of repentance and what do we learn about it? It is a part of belief, though it is not just that. Secondly, it is a redirection of the will. And let me just say, thirdly, and we could talk a lot more about it, but we'll kind of wrap it up at this point, it is life changing. And we already said that. That's the third thing you need to understand about repentance, it's life changing. You're never the same again, never. It alters everything. And let's move a little later in our little history look. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, here's what he writes in his great classic work *The Sermon on the Mount*. He says, "Repentance means that you realize that you're 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, 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 practice 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, it makes no difference, that is repentance. It's always been understood the same way. It is a complete change, life-changing and it begins at salvation and that just starts a permanent lifelong process of ongoing confession of sin.

I remember years ago when I was involved with some...some young people who were teaching against repentance and saying, "If you're a Christian, you never have to confess your sin. You never have to confess your sin." I was teaching down at UCLA at the house that had been converted to a teaching center for students at the campus. It's part of a pretty aggressive movement that had come out of Campus Crusade in those years and the teaching was, "Because we're all under grace, we don't ever have to confess our sins. All our sins are covered, forget confession." And I was talking one day to one of the leaders of the group and he said to me, "I just want you to know, we don't have to confess our sin ever."

I said, "Well could I ask you a question?" I said, "Do you? I mean, okay, let's grant that you don't have to. I just want to know, do you confess your sin?"

He said, "Yes, I do."

"Well," I said, "I'm glad to hear that. I'm glad to hear that you can't live up to that bad theology because that gives me some hope that you're a Christian. You're telling me that we don't have to do it and you're telling me you do it anyway. Of course...of course, because the new creation in you hates the sin that remains and cries out against it."

That little bit of theology was developed by some serious antinomians who went on to implode their lives. And a lot of people were victimized by it. Of course you're going to go on repenting, of course you're going to go on acknowledging your sin. Of course you're going to go on with sadness and poverty of spirit and mourning and meekness and a hunger for righteousness and holiness because repentance produces a new way of life. It's not just a different opinion about Jesus, it's a whole new life. And this kind of repentance is consistently what the Bible teaches. It's consistently through Scripture. You find it in the Old Testament, I wish I had time to go into that, but our time is pretty much gone. Isaiah 1, for example, and I think it's verse 16, "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good. Seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Come now and let us reason together," says the Lord, "though your sins are as scarlet, they'll be as white as snow, though they're red like crimson, they'll be like wool."

You want your sins washed away? Then repent. That's what Isaiah is saying. It starts internally, make yourself clean. And then it moves to your deeds, remove the evil of your deeds. Cease to do evil. I mean, this is just the biblical standard, it doesn't ever change. Salvation comes to those who turn from sin to God. Ezekiel 14:6, "Say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, repent...repent, turn away from your idols, turn your faces away from all your abominations.'" Again, I think it's the eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel, yes thirtieth verse, "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct," declares the Lord God, "repent, turn away from all your transgressions. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you've committed, make yourselves a new heart, a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, therefore repent and live."

So that when John the Baptist comes along and says, "Repent," everybody knows what he's talking about...everybody. It's not shocking. There is no message, no gospel message that is legitimate that does not press the issue of repentance. Conversion to Christ demands this. You can always get people to line up and add Jesus to their life. You can always get people to say, you know, "I want Jesus in my life, I want Him to forgive all my sins, and I want to make sure that He takes me to heaven and I want Him to fix me and I want to have His power and His direction in my life." When you start talking about the real issue of true repentance and call on sinners to abandon their sin and turn from it for good, you're talking about something very different. People want to hold to their sin while having it conveniently forgiven. That's not repentance, not at all.

Listen to Matthew 21. "What do you think, a man had two sons," Jesus said, "he came to the first and said, 'Son, go to work today in the vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will, sir,' but he didn't go. Came to the second and said the same thing. He answered and said, 'I will not.' Afterward he regretted it, he repented and went. Which of the two did the will of His father? They 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.'"

You say you want to know God, you religious Jews. But in the end, you don't do what He asks. They don't want any part of God, they don't want to do His will, but they turn and obey. Two kinds of people, those who pretend to be obedient but are actually rebellious and those who begin rebellious but repent. He was indicting the Pharisees but they couldn't see it. And He was indicting all those people who say they want to serve God but never really get around to it. Really they want God to serve them. And that was a stinging rebuke of self-condemned religious people who never really did do God's will. Tax gatherers and harlots, the scum, the riff-raff have an open door to the Kingdom rather than those superficially religious people who are verbally committed to the will of God but never in the heart do they do it.

So there's no salvation apart from repentance, the repentance that renounces sin. Is this a work of God? Absolutely it's a work of God. People always say to me, "Well, if this is a work of God, what role do I play?" I can't answer that. I can't split that hair, neither can anybody else. I know this, nobody is ever going to be saved until they repent and repentance is hard work, as we saw this morning, right? That's why I felt like talking on repentance tonight would be such a perfect parallel to what we were learning this morning, cause this is the issue getting through the narrow door. And while we believe that salvation is all a work of God and all the work of His mighty grace that overpowers us, it is that mysterious reality that it's not going to happen apart from sin, and the Bible pleads...apart from repentance from sin and the Bible pleads with the sinners to repent. I don't know how all that works together, I'm not supposed to know. My feeble brain can't contain all the great realities of divine truth, but I have to call sinners to repentance and I have to preach a gospel of repentance or else I'm preaching something other than the biblical gospel. And so do you. And more importantly, as we learn from Jesus, you better be sure you're among those who have repented and put their trust in Jesus Christ because many will seek to get in the Kingdom, but they'll never win the battle over their own sin. Let's pray.

Father, we do come to You now at the end knowing that the truth that we've heard comes directly from You. This is the amazing thing about Scripture, it just never ceases to overwhelm me that this is the voice of God. And while there are always people running around saying the Lord told them this and the Lord told them that, they are just really talking about things that they feel and think in their own minds. There are those people who think you have to listen somehow to hear the voice of God at some special mystical way. The truth of the matter is, You have spoken and You have spoken clearly, You have spoken without any ambiguity, You have spoken in a way that is absolutely understandable to our minds and hearts and You've spoken in Your Word and Your Word is the truth. And we base all of our understanding of what it is that You desire on what You have said in Your Word. And You have called us to repentance, the real thing, as a dramatic life-altering spiritual transformation. We thank You that You're the one who alone can produce it and yet not apart from our will. O God, how we pray that You would do Your mighty saving work, that You would bring true repentance to every heart so that we not only turn to Christ, but we turn willingly and eagerly no matter what the price from sin. Thank You for the gift of salvation, be gracious, Lord, to some even in the hearing of this message to give them the power and the strength to turn and to embrace You and let go of their sin, to come with empty hands and we'll thank You for that work in Your Son's name. Amen.

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).