

God Loves the Repentant

Good morning, and welcome to everyone! In this morning's lesson we will look at the biblical doctrine of repentance and see that repentance is based on faith; repentance requires a change in mind and attitude; repentance requires a change in lifestyle; and that repentance results in forgiveness.

In Luke 24:46-47 [RSV]. Jesus tells the disciples, **46. "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47. and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."** What Jesus was revealing to His disciples was that His death and resurrection were all part of God's eternal plan. Not only that, He informed them that **they** were to be a part of that same plan, too, for God desired that these men now go and preach the Gospel to a lost and dying world. The message of this Gospel to a lost and dying world also included the doctrine of repentance, a concept that is stressed throughout God's word, but unfortunately, repentance is not stressed enough today, even in the Lord's church. But as we will see, without repentance, true, biblical repentance, a person will remain forever lost in his or her sins.

There are many people today who fail to see the need to repent of their sins. Many want Jesus to save them, but they do not want to make the necessary changes in their life that God requires in His word. If they like a certain sin, then they will deny that behavior is a sin, even when it is clearly called a sin in Scripture. They will gather in their councils or synods and declare that it is now okay to accept and embrace as an alternative lifestyle what God's word says is an abomination. They will ordain as spiritual leaders in their man-made denominations those whom God's word says will not even inherit the Kingdom of God! The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 [RSV], **9. Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, 10. will inherit the Kingdom of God.** Paul also told the Galatians, **19. Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, 20. idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, 21. envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.** (Galatians 5:19-21 [RSV]) So what do these people do, these servants of Satan, when shown the truth of God's word about their immoral behavior? They gather together again and come up with a new so-called "translation" of the Bible, and pervert God's word, removing any reference to Him as being a male entity, and take away any references that differentiate the sexes so as to change God's word to promote their deviant lifestyle! A definition of repentance is to change, but is this the biblical definition of repentance, to change God's word? Is this what the Gospel teaches regarding repentance? Absolutely not!

There is a lot of confusion today as to what repentance is. Some just think that saying, "I'm sorry" means I have repented. Is this what the Gospel teaches regarding repentance? Absolutely not!

Beginning with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, every human being, with the exception of Jesus Christ, has walked contrary to God's way of life. We have all contributed our share to the sins of this world: **"Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned"** (Romans 5:12 [RSV]). In other words, we have all performed the **"works of the flesh,"** which are sinful (Galatians 5:19 [RSV]). We have all at one time or another fulfilled **"the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind."** We have all walked according to the **"course of this world"** as set by **"the prince of the power of the air"** (Ephesians 2:2-3 [RSV]).

Since all of humanity has sinned, all have, therefore, earned the penalty of sin, which is eternal death. As the Apostle Paul puts it: **"But then what return did you get from the things of which you are now ashamed? . . . For the wages of sin is death"** (Romans 6:21; 23 [RSV]). But for the grace of God, and the gift of salvation found only in His Son, Jesus Christ, this would mean **eternal** separation from Him as our just reward. Since God loves His creation so much, He has offered us the opportunity to return to Him when we repent and come to Him with a broken heart and contrite spirit (Psalm 51:17) to receive His mercy, instead of condemnation. And in this we can find and take comfort.

All human beings who have not repented of their sins are, so to speak, on spiritual "death row." They are awaiting execution of a justly deserved, ultimate capital punishment. This eternal penalty was earned by simply "doing what comes naturally," which is sinning!

But God, in His vast mercy, has provided a way of escape by which we may avoid paying that extreme penalty: **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life"** (John 3:16 [RSV]).

Our God is a loving God, and He desires and wishes that all would claim the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, for the remission of their personal sins. Paul tells us in Romans 5:8-10 [RSV], **8. But God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. 9. Since, therefore, we are now justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. 10. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life.** There is only this one way to be covered by Christ's sacrifice. There is only one way to enter into eternity as a glorified member of God's family, and a sibling of Jesus. One cannot enter into this relationship without repentance!

Acts 2:38 summarizes what an individual exhibiting obedient, saving faith does in response to the Gospel call in just one verse. Peter's very first word in that famous passage is "**Repent**"! So repentance is a vital step towards salvation. Jesus declared in Luke 13:3, 5 [RSV], "**... unless you repent you will all likewise perish.**" So what is real repentance in God's sight as it is revealed in His inspired word? What does repentance involve? What, if anything, do we have to do?

God tells us there is something we must do before He will apply the sacrifice of Christ to pay the penalty of our sins. We must demonstrate that we no longer wish to continue in the way of life which leads to eternal death. We do so by changing our way of living. That change of direction is called "repentance" in biblical terminology, and repentance means "to change" or "to turn." To repent of sin, then, simply means to change direction. We turn from the way of selfishness and self-indulgence to the way of being a selfless, giving individual. We stop serving the inordinate lusts and wants of our own flesh and begin to serve the needs of others. We turn from Satan towards God!

Once a person hears the Gospel message of Jesus and is convicted that his way of life is wrong, he must change his present behavior. Although initially repentance begins as sorrow, remorseful, or conscience-stricken for one's actions, as one grows and matures in Christ one becomes so troubled in one's heart for living outside of God's will that one begins to live according to God's standards, and according to God's law. Feeling sorry without changing one's life is not repentance! The fruits of repentance are visible actions, or, as John the Immerser said in Matthew 3:8 [RSV], we should "**bear fruit that befits repentance**" – these are "works" that demonstrate a person has actually changed. The Apostle Peter said in Acts 3:19 [RSV], "**Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out. . . .**"

It is not always going to be easy doing the right thing, especially in a world caught up in moral relativism. Listen to what Paul tells us in Romans 8:31-39 [RSV], and be comforted:

31. What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? 32. He Who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, will He not also give us all things with Him? 33. Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God Who justifies; 34. who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, Who died, yes, Who was raised from the dead, Who is at the right hand of God, Who indeed intercedes for us? 35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36. As it is written, "For Thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." 37. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us. 38. For I am sure that neither death, nor life,

nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39. nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Sin, however, is not always a wrong deed. Sometimes we sin by not doing what is right or good. James writes in James 4:17 [RSV], ***“Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”***

One must know what sin is before one can repent. One cannot repent of something of which he is ignorant. God’s word educates us as to what sin is. Romans 3:20 [RSV] says, ***“. . . through the law comes knowledge of sin.”*** One cannot repent of sin until he hears the word of God and believes it. If he hears, but does not believe, then he will not repent (Matthew 7:24-27). But he cannot believe without hearing the word, for from hearing the word derives one’s faith (Romans 10:17).

This is the problem that the Israelites had in the wilderness. The Hebrews writer says in Hebrews 3:16-19 [RSV], ***16. Who were they that heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? 17. And with whom was He provoked forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18. And to whom did He swear that they should never enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19. So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.*** The psalmist laments the rebelliousness and faithlessness of his forefathers, saying in Psalm 106:24-26 [RSV], ***24. Then they despised the pleasant land, having no faith in His promise. 25. They murmured in their tents, and did not obey the voice of the Lord. 26. Therefore He raised His hand and swore to them that He would make them fall in the wilderness. . . .***

Christ links repentance with the Kingdom of God and believing the Gospel. Once one hears the true Gospel and believes it, one begins to change the way one thinks. Peter ties repentance with forgiveness of past sins and God's giving of His Spirit. Once the Ethiopian eunuch heard Philip's explanation of the Bible, he changed his thinking (repented) and was baptized. Initial repentance includes recognition, acceptance and belief of the true Gospel and making changes in one's life to conform to the new way.

True, biblical repentance requires that we turn from a life of negativism to a life of positivism. The Apostle Paul declares in Philippians 4:8 [RSV], ***“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”*** True, biblical repentance requires that we forego our fleshly thinking and turn to spiritual matters. Once again, we turn to the Apostle Paul, who says in Galatians 5:24-25 [RSV], ***24. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the***

flesh with its passions and desires. 25. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

To change the mind we have to change our attitude. We must be willing to give ourselves fully to God. This means we must love God with everything we have. Jesus said in Mark 12:30 [RSV], “. . . ***you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.***” This means that if we draw back and hold something back from God we will be lost. The Hebrews writer tells us in Hebrews 10:38-39 [RSV], ***38. “My righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” 39. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls.***

To change the mind we have to change our heart. We must have a contrite heart instead of a proud one. David writes in Psalm 51:17 and Psalm 34:18 [RSV], ***“The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.”***

And from Solomon we learn that ***18. Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. 19. It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud.*** (Proverbs 16:18-19 [RSV])

True, biblical repentance means that we must have a circumcised heart instead of a corrupt one. Paul writes in Colossians 2:11 and Romans 2:29 [RSV], ***“In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ. . . . He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal. His praise is not from men but from God.”***

Repentance is a lifelong, ongoing process, not a “one and done” one-time event. We are to come to have the very mind of Jesus Christ, bringing absolutely every thought into captivity or control. This is the highest form of mind control. God expects us to control our own minds!

It is very comforting knowing that God allows our repentance to lead to our salvation. As David wrote in Psalm 62:5-6 [RSV], ***5. For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from Him. 6. He only is my Rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.***

God’s word is unchanging. We may attempt to change God’s word in order to justify our own sinful natures, but we have no authority to do so. Our efforts will never change the truth about God and His word for mankind.

37. Pilate said to Him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to

bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."
38. Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" (John 18:37-38 [RSV])

Pilate's question, "***What is truth?***" demands an answer. Truth that lasts, truth that changes us forever, is found only in the One Who is truth incarnate: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said in John 14:6 [RSV], "***I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by Me.***" This bold claim has scandalized peoples of all times and all places ever since that small group of Jesus' first followers took His message out from the city of Jerusalem, into the surrounding lands of Judea and Samaria, and then to the uttermost parts of the world. This great mission task continues to this very day and hour. The apostles and the first disciples were beaten, tortured and killed by various groups that rejected their message as utter foolishness and profoundly offensive. The same thing continues to today whenever this message is declared: All human beings are sinful. We are slaves of our sinful desires, thoughts and actions. We desperately need God's forgiveness, which He gives freely and completely, through Jesus, His Son. Jesus was true God and true Man, born of a virgin in the land of Palestine. He lived a life in complete obedience to God's will, thus doing for us what we can never do. He was executed on the Roman instrument of torture and death, the cross. His death was the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the entire world. His blood cleanses us from our sins, all of them. Jesus came out of the grave alive after three days, confirming and demonstrating His absolute and final victory over sin, death and all the forces of Satanic evil.

In an ever-changing world, what we need the most is an unchanging God and His unchanging word. Many passages in the word of God teach us that God and His word are unchanging.

"The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever." (Isaiah 40:8 [RSV])

"You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God" (1 Peter 1:23 [RSV]).

"For truly, I say to you, till Heaven and Earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" (Matthew 5:18 [RSV]).

"But it is easier for Heaven and Earth to pass away, than for one dot of the law to become void" (Luke 16:17 [RSV]).

Finally, take comfort in the Lord Himself, hold to His unchanging hand, and learn of Him. Jesus pleads for us to ***"Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"*** (Matthew 11:29 [RSV]). Jesus is the calm in the eye of the storm, for ***"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever"*** (Hebrews 13:8 [RSV]).