

ESCAPE FROM ENEMY LIES

Repentance is Key to Being Set Free



Repentance is a change of mind,
Here liberty is won.
Ask not, is it complete in me?
But this: Has it begun?

In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will (II Tim 2:25-26).

In the spiritual world, unseen to natural eyes, there rages a great conflict between the God of Heaven who desires to bless us and the Devil of Hell who seeks to destroy us. God is *the God of truth* (Is 65:16); Satan, the *father of lies* (Jn 8:44). By his lies, the Devil ensnares men. He lures them into a trap and takes them captive. The above text

tells us that God is able to give “repentance to the acknowledging of the truth” whereby captives may escape Satan’s snare.

Since the first man created by God fell for Satan’s lies, sin has ensnared all mankind. *For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not (Eccl 7:20)*. All have sinned against their conscience and disobeyed God’s commands. None of us have fully obeyed what Jesus identified as the *greater* commandments: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself (Lk 10:27; also Mk 12:28-31)*. Truth be known, we are all guilty of more than one sin in this curtailed list: irreverence, idolatry, agnosticism, hypocrisy, unloving, unforgiving, ungrateful, unmerciful, pride, envy, anger, jealousy, lusting, coveting, gambling, stealing, selfishness, bitterness, greediness, laziness, lying, cursing, slandering, gossiping, fornication, adultery, pornography, homosexuality, hatred, drunkenness, drug use, and abuse. Have you been taken captive? It is by “repentance to the acknowledging of the truth” that you can recover your senses and escape Satan’s snares.

The need of repentance is often present in the lives of mortals, including Christians. Certainly, unbelieving sinners are ever in need of repentance, and Christ calls them to it (Lk 5:32). Conversely, Jesus calls sinning saints to repentance (Rev 2-3). At this hour, the question before each of us is not, is my repentance complete, but has it commenced. In this life, repentance is never comprehensive and complete for sinless perfection is ever before us. Like faith, repentance will grow wider and deeper as one grows in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet, it can only grow where it has sprouted. Hence the question: Has it begun in you?

WHAT REPENTANCE IS

The word *repentance* comes from a combination of two words: the preposition *after*, and the verb form of the noun *mind*. A verb is an action word; here, it refers to what the mind does - it thinks. Thus, the word repentance means *after-thought*, which signifies a change of mind. You once thought a certain way about some issue, but further reflection leads you to see the error of your reasoning so you change your mind and afterwards think differently. This change of mind “to the acknowledging of the truth” is what the Bible calls repentance.

At its core, biblical repentance involves a change of mind about God and His will. God created us; He has a right to rule us. God created us for His glory and pleasure. He has a right to receive that from us. In repentance, we acknowledge these truths and change our mind about usurping God’s rule and ignoring His will. Furthermore, repentance involves a change of mind about self and our ways. The sin of pride is inherent in us; we think about ourselves more often (and often more highly) than we think about God! We think far too lightly of sin, not grasping its grave consequences. Having by our deeds broken God’s Law, by His Law we stand sentenced to death. We are *alienated from the life of God; dead in trespasses and sin (Eph 4:18; 2:1)*. And the works we do in this spiritually lifeless state God calls “dead works” (for they do not come from living faith in *the living God* and thus cannot please Him (*Heb 11:6*)). Consequently, at the very *foundation* of the Christian faith is *repentance from dead*

works (Heb. 6:1). In repentance, we acknowledge that even the good works we do in this life cannot wash away our sin and give us life; therefore, we give them up as a means of obtaining forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Then also, repentance involves a change of mind about Christ and His work. God's Son, Jesus Christ, *went about doing good (Acts 10:38)*; but unlike you and I, He did so *without sin (Heb 4:16)*. He then laid down His spotless life on Calvary's cross to pay our sin debt, and to wash us *from our sins in his own blood (Rev 1:5)*. After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, when Peter first preached Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins, under strong conviction the people cried out, *what shall we do? (Acts 2:37)*. Peter says, *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (38)*. They had disbelieved and rejected Christ. Peter says, change your mind; believe and receive Him. They had belittled and mocked Christ. Peter says, change your mind and crown Him Lord. They had disassociated themselves from Christ. Peter says, change your mind and identify yourself with Him – be baptized in His name.

True, biblical repentance involves a change of mind to where we acknowledge biblical truth. However, repentance is no small matter, a *mere* change of mind. Charles Spurgeon, often referred to as the 'Prince of Preachers' said, "Instead of saying, it is only a change of mind, it seems to me more truthful to say it is a great and deep change – even a change of mind itself." Oh, how great a change this change is, *for as he thinketh in his heart, so is he (Prov. 23:7)*. If you 'in your heart' (i.e., truly and sincerely) change the way you think, you change the way you act. Thus, Spurgeon went on to say, "If the man does not

live differently from what he did before ... his repentance needs to be repented of, and his conversion is a fiction.”

True repentance is a very solemn thing. It does not leave us as we were. It affects the way we do life. The new thinking results in a new direction – an about turn. As our old sinful thoughts and habits are exposed by the light of God’s truth, we repent, i.e., we change our mind, and purpose in our heart to put off the old man and put on the new. This turning from our sinful ways to our Heavenly Father’s righteous ways is the issue of repentance. Scripture confirms this. It repeatedly ties this change of mind with a change of course.

In the book of Exodus, after Pharaoh let God’s people go, *God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt (13:17)*. God knew that if His chosen people repented (changed their mind) they would also turn around and head in the other direction (change their course).

The prophet Ezekiel proclaimed: *Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations (14:6)*. God connects repentance with *turning from* sin and idols (and thus *to* righteousness and the one true God). Thinking anew leads to turning aright.

John the Baptist was not satisfied with a mere change of mind. He called men to repent and *bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance (Lk 3:8)*. To the people who had an abundance he said, quit hoarding; start giving (10-11). To the tax collectors who sought dishonest gain

while collecting taxes he said, quit dealing unjustly; start dealing justly (12-13). To the soldiers who were cruel and corrupt in carrying out their duties he said, quit your meanness; be kind – quit your lying; be truthful (14). John’s preaching of repentance was designed to *turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just* (Lk 1:17).

Jesus told a story. *A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went*” (Mt 21:28-29). When he changed his mind, he altered his action.

Repentance encompasses the whole of our being: mind, will and emotions. Our mind, once changed by exposure to the life-giving truths of God’s holy Word, leads to our will yielding to and our emotions delighting in these very truths. Never perfectly, (perhaps, at times, very poorly (Lk 17:3-4)), but by God’s grace, progressively.

WHAT REPENTANCE IS NOT

Not everything that looks like repentance is repentance. For instance, simply acknowledging one’s sin is not repentance. After the plague of killing hail, Pharaoh said, *I have sinned this time: the LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked* (Ex. 9:27). Pharaoh confessed his sin and wickedness, and even confirmed God’s righteousness. But after Moses entreated the LORD and the hail ceased, the Bible says Pharaoh “*sinned yet more*” (9:34).

Neither is remorse and being sorry for sin a sure sign of repentance. The clearest example of this is Judas. *Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was*

condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders Mt 21:3). Here the word translated *repented* does not mean *after-thought* but *after-care*. It refers to the remorse and regret one feels because of the consequences of sin. Judas was remorseful. He was sorrowful; he regretted his actions. However, he did not turn from his ways to God's ways. While sorrow for sin will characterize true repentance, not all sorrow does. *For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death (II Cor. 7:10).* This worldly sorrow was the sorrow of Judas, and it did what it does – it worked death.

Even turning from a sin is no proof of repentance. Many people regret past actions and determine to change - and to some degree do. They reform, but never have a change of mind toward God. Paul preached *repentance toward God (Acts 20:21)*. All sin is against God; therefore, a change of mind toward God is vital. The Prodigal Son demonstrated this genuine repentance when he said, *Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee" (Lk. 15:18)*. To straighten out some aspect of one's life, to get things right with another without getting things right with Heaven, is shortsighted.

We might also add this: repentance is not synonymous with faith. Paul preached *"repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21)*. Repentance is to change one's mind about offending God by continuance in sin. Faith is to trust in the finished work of Christ for forgiveness of sin. Repentance looks within and sees the sin. Faith looks above and sees the Savior. The two go

hand in hand but are not the other. They are separate works of God's grace that come together in salvation.

You may be asking, "Which comes first, repentance or faith?" John the Baptist by the preaching of repentance made *ready a people prepared for the Lord (Lk 1:17)*. Jesus said to the religious leaders, *ye ... repented not afterward, that ye might believe (Mt. 21:32)*. Here, repentance appears to be a condition for coming to faith in Christ; yet, perhaps it is more a description of what coming to Christ involves. For may not repentance be born of faith since *the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance (Rom 2:4)* - and the good news of the gospel is God's goodness at its zenith! So, does faith then come before repentance? Spurgeon answers the dilemma. "If ever you are asked which comes first, repentance or faith, you may answer by another question: 'Which spoke of the wheel moves first when the wheel begins to move?'"

HOW REPENTANCE IS EXPERIENCED

How can those who love their sin turn from it? Enslaved by Satan, they cannot escape even if they wanted to - like the young woman once profiled in *Psychology Today*. She had come to her psychiatrist for help. She told him she was exhausted and sickened by her life-style, one of endless rounds of parties and all that went with it. Peering into her eyes her psychiatrist asked, "Why don't you stop?" Puzzled by the question, she replied, "You mean I don't have to do what I want to do?" How can this dear soul and others like her turn from doing what they love to do even though it is hurtful and destructive? Here is how: Humble yourself and listen to God. *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble (Jam 4:6)*.

Just as faith to *believe on Christ* is a God-given gift (*Phil 1:29*), so also is repentance. Scripture says, God has exalted His crucified, resurrected Son *to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31)*. Not to the Jews alone is repentance given, for *God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life (Acts 11:18)*. Whoever will humble themselves and listen to instruction from God's Word is a potential recipient of these twin gifts (*Rom 1:17; Lk 16:29-31; Jn 6:44-45*). In fact, even those who "oppose themselves" (i.e., those who are disputatious and argumentative, who resist and deny the truth), if they will but give attention to what God says in His Word, perhaps God "will give [even] them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (*II Tim 2:25*).

Jesus came to earth *to call ... sinners to repentance (Lk 5:32)*. In the first Gospel written we have the first recorded words out of the mouth of the Son of God: *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel (Mk 1:15)*. The first time Jesus sent His disciples out two by two, *they went out, and preached that men should repent (Mk 6:12)*. Among the last instructions He gave His disciples before ascending into Heaven was *that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations (Lk 24:47)*. The last book in the Bible contains the last letters written to churches wherein Jesus calls them to remember from where they had fallen and to *repent (Rev 2-3)*. After Jesus ascended into Heaven, His apostles continued this urgent call. Peter did. *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38)*. *Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your*

sins may be blotted out (Acts 3:19). Paul did. He testified both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). He showed that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance (Acts 26:20). He declared, God commandeth all men every where to repent (Acts 17:30).

God commands *all* to repent because God loves all (*Jn 3:16*). He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (*II Pet 3:9*). Jesus lovingly warns, *except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish (Lk 13:3,5)*. People are prone to think that great sinners deserve to perish in hell but somehow they will escape. Jesus reminds us that no one will escape apart from repentance.

Friend, I beseech you, humble yourself and listen to God. Open a Bible (preferably to the New Testament first) and read. Go to a Bible preaching church (that lovingly calls sinners to repentance) and hear. The Word of God is *the word of life (Phil 2:16)*. God uses Holy Scripture to bring people to the acknowledging of His truth and to faith in His Son so He might grant them forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. If you are so proud that you will not allow the God who created you to teach you, you have no chance of escaping His judgment, and give ample proof of being deserving of it.

HOW REPENTANCE IS MANIFESTED

When writing to the church at Corinth after there had been repentance for some failure, the apostle Paul identified certain attitudes seen in the repentant ones. Concerning those who *sorrowed after a godly sort*, Paul writes,

what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter (II Cor 7:10-11). Here are seven attitudes by which the repentance of the people manifested itself, proving them cleared with regard to the sin and failure in question. While the contextual meaning of these words is shaped by the particular circumstances at Corinth, in general repentance produces to some degree in the repentant the following.

- ... Carefulness - The repentant are no longer careless and unconcerned about their soul and sin in their lives. The old attitude of complacency gives way to a new hunger for righteousness.
- ... Clearing of yourselves – The repentant desires to clear his or her name not by denying but owning their failure and making an about turn, setting out to do right.
- ... Indignation – Repentance excites righteous indignation. There is animosity for the Tempter, abhorrence of one's sin, and anger with oneself (for grieving God, hurting others, and in some cases bringing reproach upon the name of Christ and His church).
- ... Fear – Repentance fosters a healthy fear of displeasing God, and of facing God's displeasure. Recognizing God's providential rule in His chastening rod produces a greater reverence for one's Heavenly Father who so earnestly cares for His errant child.
- ... Vehement desire – Sincere repentance creates a heartfelt yearning to get things right – to make amends, satisfy

debts, restore relationships, etc. There is an anxious wish to rectify wrongs.

... Zeal – True repentance ignites a new devotion to righteousness and truth. This leads to a new fervor for God and His glory, for the church and her good, and for the gospel and its spread.

... Revenge – The repentant agrees that sin merits punishment and wrong deserves redressed. There is a trusting willingness to comply with societal justice as allocated by an all-wise Heavenly Father (whose mercy often triumphs - *Ps 103:10-14; Jam 2:13*).

In all these things the repentant show themselves “to be clear” with regard to the sin. Clear! Nothing so refreshes the soul as does a cleared, clean conscience. Is yours stained and troubled? May the promise of God stated in Isaiah 1:18 and cited in this Mary Kidder stanza hearten you to repent.

Lord, my sins they are many, like the sands of the sea,
But Thy blood, O my Savior, is sufficient for me;
For Thy promise is written in bright letters that glow,
‘Tho your sins be as scarlet, I will make them like snow.’

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