

Repentance

Introduction:

“Repentance is not what is spoken in words but what is confirmed by deeds.”

~ John Chrysostom, circa 390 AD, Bishop of Constantinopleⁱ

“I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.”

~ Paul the Apostle, circa 58 AD, Caesareaⁱⁱ (Acts 26:20)

Repentance has to do with the way we live life. It is not merely an abstract idea.

Defining Repentance:

- Gerry Breshears and Mark Driscoll offer these helpful thoughts:
 - “Because we worship our way into sin, ultimately we need to worship our way out of it.”
 - “When Christians commit sin, they do not cease worshipping. Rather, their worship is directed away from the Creator and toward created things.”
 - “Repentance is the act of turning from sin and returning to God by trusting in Jesus Christ, who alone is the perfect worshipper.”
 - “This fact helps idolaters be transformed into worshippers. John had just this in mind when he summarized his entire epistle with the closing line, ‘Keep yourselves from idols.’”ⁱⁱⁱ

- J.I. Packer explains that the New Testament word for repentance means...
 - “...changing one’s mind so that one’s views, values, goals, and ways are changed and one’s whole life is lived differently. The change is radical, both inwardly and outwardly; mind and judgment, will and affections, behavior and life-style, motives and purposes, are all involved. Repenting means starting to live a new life.”

Repentance in Scripture:

- I. The call to repent was the first and fundamental summons in the preaching of key NT people:
 1. **John the Baptist**
Matt. 3:2
"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

 2. **Jesus**
Matt. 4:17
From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

 3. **the Twelve**
Mark 6:12
So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.

4. **Peter at Pentecost**

Acts 2:38

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

5. **Paul to the Gentiles**

Acts 17:30

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,

Acts 26:15-23

And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16 But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, 17 delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles--to whom I am sending you 18 to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' 19 "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.

6. **The glorified Christ** to five of the seven churches in Asia

Rev. 2:5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

16 Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

22 Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works,

3:3 Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.

19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

II. Repentance was part of Jesus' summary of the gospel that was to be taken to the world

Luke 24:45-47

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and said to them, "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 proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

III. Repentance corresponds to the constant summons of the Old Testament prophets to Israel to return to the God from whom they had strayed.

Jer. 23:22

But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds.

Jer. 25:4-5

You have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear, although the LORD persistently sent to you all his servants the prophets, 5 saying, 'Turn now, every one of you, from his evil way and evil deeds, and dwell upon the land that the LORD has given to you and your fathers from of old and forever.

Zech. 1:3-6

"Therefore say to them, Thus declares the LORD of hosts: Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. 4 Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.' But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the LORD. 5 Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? 6 But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? So they repented and said, As the LORD of hosts purposed to deal with us for our ways and deeds, so has he dealt with us."

IV. Repentance is a fruit of faith, which is itself a fruit of regeneration. But in actual life, repentance is inseparable from faith, being the negative aspect (faith is the positive aspect) of turning to Christ as Lord and Savior.

In other words, repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin.

The idea that there can be saving faith without repentance, and that one can be justified by embracing Christ as Savior while refusing him as Lord, is a destructive delusion. True faith acknowledges Christ as what He truly is, our God-appointed King as well as our God-given Priest, and true trust in Him as Savior will express itself in submission to Him as Lord also.

To refuse this is to seek justification through an impenitent faith, which is no faith. *"In repentance,"* says the Westminster Confession, *"a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature, and righteous law of God; and upon the apprehension of his mercy in Christ to such as are penitent; so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with him in all ways of his commandments."* (XV.2)

This statement highlights the fact that incomplete repentance, sometimes called "attrition" (remorse, self-reproach, and sorrow for sin generated by fear of punishment, without any wish or resolve to forsake sinning) is insufficient.

True repentance is “contrition,” as modeled by David in Psalm 51, having at its heart a serious purpose of sinning no more but of living henceforth a life that will show one’s repentance to be full and real. Repenting of any vice means going in the opposite direction—to practice the virtues most directly opposed to it.^{iv}

Luke 3:8 (John the Baptist)

“Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.”

Acts 26:20

“I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.” (NIV)

Conclusion:

“It is entirely biblical for the church to make repentance the chief feature of its message to the unsaved world. After all, the gospel calls people to come to the One who can deliver them from sin. People who don’t feel guilt or their need to be delivered from the power and penalty of sin wouldn’t even want a deliverer.

I am deeply concerned as I watch what is happening in the church today. Biblical Christianity has lost its voice. The church is preaching a gospel designed to soothe rather than confront sinful individuals. Churches have turned to amusement and show business to try to win the world. Those methods may seem to draw crowds for a season. But they’re not God’s methods, and therefore they are destined to fail. In the meantime, the church is being infiltrated and corrupted by professing believers who have never repented, never turned from sin, and therefore, never really embraced Christ as Lord or Savior.

We must return to the message God has called us to preach. We need to confront sin and call sinners to repentance—to a radical break from the love of sin and a seeking of the Lord’s mercy. We must hold up Christ as Savior and Lord, the one who frees His people from the penalty and power of sin. That is, after all, the gospel He has called us to proclaim.”^v ~ John MacArthur

ⁱ McKinion, S. A. *Isaiah 1-39. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture OT 10* (16). 2004, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

***Historical Note:** *In Syrian Antioch in the 390s, a tax increase threw the citizens into a frenzy. Rioting, they tore down imperial statues. While Bishop Flavian rushed to Constantinople to plead for mercy with the emperor, who was expected to take awful revenge, Chrysostom preached a series of sermons to the terrified populace. As they awaited the imperial decision, death stared them in the face. Chrysostom's fierce attacks on sin cut their consciences and many sought the peace of confession and repentance. Fortunately, the Emperor pardoned the city.* <http://www.christianity.com/ChurchHistory/11629689/>

ⁱⁱ H. Wayne House, *Chronological and Background Charts of the New Testament*, p. 126, 1981, Grand Rapids, Mich., Zondervan.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mark Driscoll & Gerry Breshears, *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe*, p. 364-65, 2010, Wheaton, Ill., Crossway.

^{iv} Packer, J. I., *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs*. 1995, Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House.

^v MacArthur, John. *The Gospel According to the Apostles: The Role of Works in the Life of Faith*. 2000, Nashville, TN: Word Pub.