

THE DECISION IS YOURS #3

“The Decision to Repent”

I. Introduction

A. Quick Bible Quiz: 4 Questions 1 Answer

(Hint: The Subject of the Sermon is the Answer)

#1 What was the subject of the 1st sermon in the New Testament?
Matthew 3:2: John the Baptist: “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”

#2 What was the subject of the 1st sermon of Jesus?
Matthew 4:17: “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”

#3 What was the subject of the 1st sermon preached after the resurrection?
When Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, the people cried out, “What must we do to be saved?” what was the answer?
Acts 2:38: “Repent, and be baptized, every one of you...”

#4 When you share the Gospel with a lost person or someone who is ignorant of the Gospel, what do you tell them is the 1st thing God wants them to do?

**In the past, God overlooked such ignorance,
but now He commands all men everywhere to repent.
Acts 17:30**

I could add one more: “Which foundational doctrine of the Christian faith is most neglected in modern American pulpits?” (Same answer)
And yet with all this, in my experience, many good Christian people cannot really define the term repentance or explain what it means to repent!

B. What is Repentance and What Does it Mean to Repent?

1. The Greek philosopher Plato said that you do not really understand something until you can define it. So what does it mean to repent?

2. There are 2 ingredients to biblical repentance; revealed by what the words mean in the original languages:

- a. In the New Testament, the Greek word for “repent” literally means, “to change your mind.” Repentance begins in the soul; it is a decision of the will.
- b. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for “repent” literally means, “to turn around.” So repentance means to change your behavior.

True Repentance Consists of Two Things

- It means a *change of mind* that results in a *change in behavior*
- It is more than being sorry for my sins; or sorry I got caught

“Repentance is a decision that sets us up for blessing: it is to change our mind and carry it out by an outward act; to turn around and go the other way; a 180 degree turn.”
Derek Prince

3. Perhaps the most perfect picture of repentance in the Bible is found in the famous parable of the “Prodigal Son”. (Luke 15)

The younger of a wealthy man’s 2 sons demands his inheritance immediately and the father complies. **The young man goes to a far country and wastes all his money on riotous living until he is so broke that the only job he can find is feeding pigs.**

(Remember that to a Jew, this would be the lowest one could go! And I am sorry to say that in my experience many people will not repent until they find themselves as low as they can go.)

But then the story takes a wonderful turn in v.17 when the young man has a *change of mind*...

Luke 15:17-25

17 "But when he came to his senses, (the KJV says, “and when he came to himself”) he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!

18 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.”

This is a perfect 2 part picture true repentance; first, he changed his mind; he sees his sin and its result; he “came to his senses” BUT HE IS ONLY HALF-DONE-

Remember that repentance means to change your mind, but it is not complete until you TURN AROUND! Many people are like the prodigal; they make bad decisions that brings them into sorrow; they know they need to change; they want to change but they never do. Because there is a sorrow that is not “godly sorrow”;

Godly sorrow produces repentance that leads to salvation...

2 Corinthians 7:10

My own personal testimony applies here. I had to come to the lowest point of my life before my sorrow became “godly sorrow” that brought true repentance: a change of mind and a change of behavior:

Godly sorrow>Repentance (change of mind)>Change of life

This is the pattern for the Prodigal: He had a godly sorrow; He “came to his senses”; and then v.20...

Luke 15:20 "And he got up and went to his father." He changed his mind then his behavior; with this result...

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him. 21 "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

22 "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry; 24 for this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' And they began to be merry.

Pause to Review

What is Repentance?

Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of heart that leads to a change in actions. It is a turning from sin and a turning toward God.

The perfect picture of repentance is the Prodigal son who made the “*Decision to Repent*”.

“Repentance is not an emotion. It is not feeling sorry for your sins. It is a decision.”

Eugene Peterson

4. We have to hammer home this point because we live in a culture where there is a great deal of what I might call...

C. Counterfeit Repentance

1. Counterfeit repentance produces counterfeit Christians; those who mistake remorse or regret for repentance.

“There’s a difference between remorse and repentance. Remorse is being sorry for being caught. Repentance is being sorry enough to stop.”

Greg Laurie

2. Consider the case of Judas Iscariot...

Matthew 27:3-5 NASB

3 Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 4 saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See *to that* yourself!" 5 And he threw the pieces of silver into the sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.

a. Judas is a perfect picture of a counterfeit Christianity; although near to Jesus throughout His ministry, his heart never changed; in the end he felt remorse but he never repented. And he lost his soul.

3. An Old Testament example is Esau, the brother of Jacob, mentioned in the 12th chapter of Hebrews:

Hebrews 12:14-16

14 Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: (this deserves a sermon itself)

15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; ...

16 lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.

Hebrews 12:17

17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

- a. Esau sold his destiny for a bowl of chili!
- b. Later, he felt sorry about it, and “wanted to inherit the blessing”
- c. BUT HE WAS “REJECTED”. Why? Because he “found no place or repentance though he sought it diligently with tears!”

4. Testimony: I have witnessed 100’s of altar calls and seen many people come forward with much sorrow and even tears and the temptation is to think true repentance is taking place; but not necessarily.

- a. The great “prince of preachers” once said:

C.H. Spurgeon

“Many fancy that sufficient repentance requires many tears to be shed, groans to be heaved and despair to be endured. But whence cometh this? They are in great error. To repent is to change your mind about sin, Christ, and all the great things of God.”

- b. In more modern times, the great theologian J.I. Packer says...

“Repentance is basically not moaning and remorse, but turning and change.”

J.I. Packer

5. Repentance is not an emotion; it is a decision; it may or may not be emotional or tearful; the only *sure* proof of true repentance is a changed life!

II. Some Theological Thoughts on the Subject of Repentance

A. Repentance Originates With God

1. True repentance begins with God, not man. It does not originate in the will of man but in the sovereign grace of God.

2. Man, left to himself, will never repent. Unless the Spirit of God moves upon us, repentance is impossible.

Prayers of David and Jeremiah:

Restore us, O God, and we shall be saved. Psalm 80:3
Jeremiah prayed...

Turn us back to you, Lord, and we will be restored. Lamentations 5:21

3. Repentance is only possible because of the grace of God!

Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that it is “the goodness of God that leads us to repentance”.

Romans 4:2

4. Notice Paul’s instruction to Timothy:

24 And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, (or to “acknowledge” the truth) 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

2 Timothy 2:24-26 NASB

a. **The KJV says, ‘in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves’!** The sinner is living a life where he “opposes” himself! He is his own worst enemy. Oh how sad to see those we love on a collision course to destruction! To watch them continue to make choices that will hurt them! Our job is to teach, to be gentle, to be patient, and hope that God may grant them the gift of repentance.

5. This is why the greatest crisis in a person’s life comes at the moment when the grace of God draws near with an offer of repentance; only the decision to repent can save them, because...

B. There is No Salvation Apart from Repentance

Jesus in Mark 1:14-15

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the Gospel.

The Apostle Peter in Acts 3:19

Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out when the times of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord...

Acts 3:19

The Apostle Paul in Acts 20

v.20 And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house...

What Did Paul Not Hold Back?

v.21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. One of the causes of all the counterfeit Christianity in American culture is the teaching that offers salvation apart from repentance.

“True faith comes only after repentance. We cannot be saved without repentance, a decision which determines our destiny.”

Derek Prince

2. Somehow we have separated what we shouldn't! Derek continued...

The apostolic message never separated repentance and faith. There is no true faith without repentance, and true repentance always includes a new life of faith.

3. The New Testament pattern for salvation is (1) Repent and (2) Believe. But the modern mindset focuses on faith with little mention of repentance. And faith without repentance will not produce a permanent change in behavior!

a. Does this explain the current condition of the church in America?

4. We also need to know there is a point of no return: like Esau and Judas.

He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

Proverbs 29:1

a. As Saint Augustine said...

“God has promised forgiveness to your repentance, but He has not promised tomorrow to your procrastination.”

St. Augustine

b. Isaac Watts, one of the greatest hymn writers...

“There is no repentance in the grave.”

Isaac Watts

c. Preaching on repentance has never been popular...

“People on earth hate to hear the word ‘repent’. Those in hell wish they could hear it just once more.”

A.W. Tozer

III. Some Closing: Thoughts on Repentance to Those Who Are Saved

A. Check Your Foundation

2 Corinthians 13:5

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you are disqualified?

1. The test of true repentance and being saved is nothing less than a changed life.

“True repentance will entirely change you; the bias of your soul will be changed; then you will delight in God, in Christ, in His Law, and in His people.”

George Whitefield

a. We are not saying we never slip up and sin! But...

2. We must never be afraid to look at our lives as to the quality of our repentance:

“If your repentance has not changed your life, you need to repent of your repentance.”

Steven Lawson

B. Repentance is Not Just a One-Time Decision-It is a Lifestyle

“Repentance is a characteristic of a whole life, not just the action of a single moment.”

Sinclair B. Ferguson

1. A sure test my original repentance was real is if I am still repenting!

“The evidence that you truly repented long ago is that you are still repenting now, and even to a greater degree.”

Paul Washer

2. My personal experience has been that the closer I get to God the more I find myself in need of repentance.

“The Christian who has stopped repenting has stopped growing.”

A.W. Pink

3. Testimony: By God’s grace, I have been able to recognize my ongoing need for repentance. Whenever I find my life tracking in a bad way; sadness, depression, loss of joy; I try to find a quiet place in the presence of God and He is always faithful to help me. It usually means repentance; it always involves a decision!

Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of heart that leads to a change in actions. It is a turning from sin and a turning toward God.

No one can begin a new life unless he repent of the old.

St. Augustine

ADDENDUM

In an [article](#) titled "Whatever Became of Repentance?" Christianity Today's Mark Galli writes:

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther is said to have posted 95 theses, or "Disputation on the Power of Indulgences," on the door of All Saints Church. The professor of moral theology at the University of Wittenberg was proposing an academic debate about indulgences—the practice of doing good works or offering money in order to remove punishment for sin. Luther was disturbed by how indulgences encouraged people to pay for forgiveness rather

than repent. Instead, Luther argued: "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when he said 'Repent,' willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance."

That is as hard to swallow today as it was then. We are not the first to notice how absent the theme of repentance is today. Karl Menninger's 1988 bestseller *Whatever Became of Sin?* could have easily included a sequel, *Whatever Became of Repentance?*

Galli notes that repentance is unpopular because we're "addicted" to justifying our own actions and pointing out the evil in others. If I really looked at my own self-centeredness and pride, Galli argues, I'd have to admit that I am also a hypocrite and a moral failure. He concludes:

Well, yes. Aren't we all? That's precisely why Jesus came, to save the world from itself *and* to save us from ourselves. That's why the word *repentance* is usually connected to the phrase "good news," as Mark highlights in his summary of Jesus' early preaching: "Repent and believe the good news!" (1:15).