

Sunday, May 17, 2026 - How Shall We Respond to the Gospel? - Pastor John Henry Raskin

The Gospel is a free gift—purchased by Christ and offered by Grace. But free gifts must still be received.

The Gift of Salvation (The Gospel)

- God is holy, just, and loving.
- Sin is not merely bad behavior but rebellion against God.
- Sin separates us from God and leaves us spiritually dead.
- God built a bridge to us through Jesus Christ—fully God and fully man.
- Jesus lived the life we could not live, died the death we deserved, and rose again to defeat sin and death for us.

Jesus' Call to Respond

“Repent and believe in the gospel.”— Mark 1:15

Repentance and faith are not ways to earn salvation. They are how we receive what God freely gives.

A drowning person does not earn their rescue by grabbing the rope—but they must grab it to be saved.

The Three Movements of Response

1. Repentance - *A turning away from sin and toward God with your whole being*

- Not just regret or feeling bad about consequences.
- True repentance is a change of mind and direction (*metanoia*).
- Worldly sorrow focuses on consequences.
- Godly sorrow recognizes sin against God and leads to salvation.

Repentance involves:

- **The Mind** — recognizing sin as rebellion against God
- **The Emotions** — a genuine grief over sin
- **The Will** — a decisive turn in direction

You come as you are—but turned toward God, with empty hands.

To Believers who struggle with faith: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. – 1 John 1:9

2. Faith

A wholehearted trust in Christ alone

“For by grace you have been saved through faith... it is the gift of God.”— Ephesians 2:8

Saving faith includes:

1. **Knowledge** — knowing who Jesus is and what He has done
2. **Assent** — agreeing with God's verdict about sin and salvation
3. **Trust** — resting the full weight of your soul on Christ (*Fiducia*)

Faith is not just knowing a chair exists and believing it is strong enough to hold you—it is sitting down.

3. Ongoing Trust - *A daily, persevering reliance on Christ*

“As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.”— Colossians 2:6–7

- The Christian life is not “believe once, then try harder.”
- It is continual reliance on Christ by the Holy Spirit.
- Repentance and faith shape the entire life of a believer.

New Life in the Holy Spirit

Salvation is the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:

- **Not by our works**
- **By God's mercy**
- **Through regeneration and renewal**

Three Honest Questions

1. **Have you genuinely repented?**
2. **Is your faith resting on Christ alone?**
3. **Are you trusting Him today?**

UNDERSTANDING THE GOSPEL PART 4 OF 5

HOW SHALL WE RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL?

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Over the past several weeks we have been walking through the gospel together.

We have seen who God is — holy, just, and overflowing with loyal love.

We have seen what sin is — not just bad behavior, but a rebellious desire to do things OUR way when God made us for partnership with Himself.

We have observed how catastrophic that turning away from our Creator is and that it leaves us guilty, broken, and spiritually dead.

We have acknowledged that our sinful nature has created an uncrossable canyon between our Heavenly Father and us.

We have seen the Bridge that a Holy God built from His side so that He could abide, now and forever, with His creation as sinful as we are.

We have seen that the Bridge God built to us is the Person of Jesus Christ — fully God and fully man — and we have marveled at the Work He accomplished:

That He lived the life we could never live, died the death we deserved, and rose triumphantly from the grave to overcome the fear of death and the power of sin FOR us.

But through all of the past three weeks you may have wondered... How does that relationship with Christ that saves, that eternal life with God become yours?

You may have even grown up in the church, studied the Bible, listened to hours and hours of pastorly preaching on TV and the internet and still you may have wondered why you still fear death and struggle with the same old sins when others seem set free.

You may have secretly wondered how does this relationship with God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit become yours personally?

Today we will answer that question directly:

Imagine someone hands you a gift — a beautifully wrapped package, held out freely, asking nothing in return. What do you do?

Hopefully, you reach out and take it. That reaching out, that receiving, is what we are talking about today.

The gospel is a free gift — purchased entirely by Christ, offered entirely by grace.

But free gifts must be received.

If we think about it, we all know people who are so suspicious that something will be expected of them that they would not accept this beautifully wrapped package.

Their mantra is something like “There is no such thing as a free lunch” or “You get what you pay for”.

But as we have discovered this beautiful gift of salvation truly is free to those who receive it.

There is no catch but there is a very specific way that it must be received.

The Bible is very clear about how we are to receive this gift: through repentance, through faith, and through ongoing trust in the Giver.

Today we are going to explore how to respond to the Grace of God that is the gospel.

THE THREE MOVEMENTS OF RESPONSE

REPENTANCE - *A turning away from sin and toward God with your whole being.*

FAITH - *A wholehearted trust in Christ alone for forgiveness and the abundant life.*

TRUST - *A daily, persevering reliance on the character and promises of God.*

Let's look at what Jesus tells us Himself about how we are to respond to the gift of the gospel.

Mark 1:14-15

14 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, **15** and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

I find the placement of this scripture extremely telling in Mark's gospel.

These two verses are set between Jesus temptation by Satan in the desert and His first encounter with the disciples when He tells them to leave their fishing boats and follow Him.

These are the first recorded public words of Jesus in Mark's Gospel.

He doesn't begin His announcement that the Kingdom of God has arrived with a long lecture.

He begins with an urgent, clear, two-word command: repent and believe.

It is also telling that he makes this proclamation immediately after John the Baptist is imprisoned.

Jesus' ministry has now been launched by the ministry of John whose entire baptism was one of repentance.

In order to understand the importance of this we must understand what repentance truly means.

Jesus is announcing that the King has now arrived and has brought the Kingdom with Him. He says "repent and believe".

Notice what Jesus does not say.

He does not say: clean yourself up first, then come.

He does not say: earn enough merit, then believe.

He says the kingdom is at hand — it is here, it is free, it is now — and the only right response is to repent and believe.

This tells us something crucial from the very outset: repentance and faith are not what we do to deserve salvation.

They are what we do to receive it. There is a profound difference.

A drowning man does not earn his rescue by grabbing the rope that is offered him — but he must grab the rope to be saved.

So, what is repentance?

How is it different from regret... or remorse?

I did quite a few years of jail house ministry. That's where I would meet people who had just been arrested and pray with them.

Many of them had no idea why of all the times they had been drinking and driving, tonight was the night that they got arrested

or how they happened to be in that wrong place at that wrong time today of all days.

All of them regretted getting caught. Some of them even felt sorry for what they did although many did not.

The apostle Paul draws the distinction between regret, sorrow for our acts and true repentance.

2 Corinthians 7:10 NIV

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

Here Paul defines worldly sorrow as a selfish grief over the consequences of sin such as getting caught, losing reputation, or facing punishment rather than sorrow over offending God.

This sorrow produces regret, bitterness and self-pity and but lacks true repentance.

Let's look again at Jesus words in the gospel of Mark...

“Repent and believe in the gospel.”

In Mark's Gospel, the word Jesus uses for repent, is the Greek word metanoia, meaning a change of mind, a change of direction, a turning of the entire person away from self and toward God.

It is far more than feeling sorry.

Paul illuminates for us that worldly grief is sorrow about consequences — feeling bad because you got caught, because you're embarrassed.

Godly grief looks upward and says, 'I have sinned against You God and I can't seem to change'.

Worldly grief leads to despair or to depression, which can make the problem worse. In the best case scenario, it may lead to trying harder to change yourself but that usually fails.

However Godly grief leads to repentance, a recognition of sin you can't fix, and asking God to change you, to actually turn your life around.

True repentance involves three movements and involves the entire soul: Mind, Emotions and Will.

1. The mind recognizing sin for what it is. Not a mistake.

Not a weakness. Sin is rebellion against a holy God.

Repentance begins when we see sin the way God sees it — as something that separates us from Him, that we are rightly accountable for.

That is where we began this series.

2. The emotions become genuinely grieved. This is not manufactured weeping or performed remorse.

It is the honest ache of a person who loves God and grieves that they have offended him.

David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, captures this in Psalm 51, a Psalm of repentance after his sin with Bathsheba when he cries out: 'Against You, You only, have I sinned.'

3. The will turns. Repentance is not merely feeling bad about the past — it is a decisive turning in a new direction.

It does not mean perfect behavior from that point forward.

It means a sincere change of allegiance: no longer living for self and sin but now living for God and His glory.

I would like to put to rest here a common misconception that validates the “There is no free lunch” way of thinking.

Some people fear that repentance is a work. That God is requiring moral self-improvement before He will accept you.

Repentance is not cleaning yourself up before God.

It is turning toward God precisely because you cannot clean yourself up.

You can come as you are — but you must come turned around, facing Him, with empty hands.

Now that we understand repentance we must turn to the question...
What is Faith?

Ephesians 2:8

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

This passage makes something unmistakably plain: you are saved by grace, through faith — and even saving faith is not your own doing. It is a part of this glorious gift of the gospel.

Faith is not a work we perform to earn God's favor.

Faith is the hand that reaches out to receive the favor that is already freely offered.

The Church Reformers spoke of three elements in saving faith:

- 1. Knowledge (Notitia).** Saving faith knows something. It knows who Jesus is and what He did. You cannot trust someone you know nothing about.

2. Assent or Agreement (Assensus). But knowing facts about Jesus is not saving faith. The Apostle James tells us that even the demons believe and tremble.

Assent means personally agreeing with God's view of your sinful nature and that you gratefully receive the gift of Jesus death and resurrection for yourself.

It is you basically saying... 'Yes, I am the sinner; He is the Savior; this applies to me.'

3. Trust (Fiducia). Here is the heart of it. Saving faith is ultimately a personal entrusting of yourself to Jesus Christ, casting yourself wholly upon Him, resting the weight of your soul entirely on who He is and what He has done.

Faith is not merely believing that Christ died. It is believing that Christ died for you and that He was raised to life again by the power of God's Spirit, that He rules and reigns right now from the Throne of Grace and that His Spirit has been given to lead and guide you into New and Abundant Life.

Think of a chair. You may know it exists. You may even believe it is sturdy.

But faith is sitting down — putting your full weight on it. Trusting it to hold you up.

Saving faith rests on Christ alone, not on Christ plus your efforts.

What does this resting my weight, this ongoing trust in Jesus look like?

Colossians 2:6-7 NKJV

6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

Colossians 2:6–7 NLT

6 And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. 7 Let your roots grow down into him and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.

Repentance and faith are not merely the entrance to the Kingdom of God.

They describe the entire shape of the abundant life of the true Christ follower.

The way you received Christ is the way you are to walk in Him.

You received Christ by turning from self-sufficiency and trusting Him, His Spirit and His Word.

You walk with Christ by continually turning from self-sufficiency and self-direction and continually trusting Him and allowing His Spirit to lead your life.

The Christian life is not: believe once, then live by self-effort.

It is... trust Him today, trust Him with tomorrow, and trust Him for eternity.

This was Martin Luther's first thesis: 'When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said Repent, he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.'

This is not a life of perpetual guilt.

It is a life of perpetual honesty seeing where we are broken, running to Christ, receiving His ongoing grace and rising to walk on in gratitude.

We need to understand that in the flesh we still fall short of God's glory.

We mentioned last week that sanctification is different from justification.

This is where that distinction is made clear.

By our initial repentance and belief in Christ's finished work on the cross we are justified before God the Father and have entered the Kingdom of God in Christ.

Now, in gratitude for that great gift of salvation, the overflow of our hearts should lead us into the desire to allow His spirit to conform us into His image.

That is why ongoing repentance is still important.

We fall short of our calling so often and once we see the need to change by the guidance of God's Spirit, that need should bring us to renewed repentance, asking God to change us in that area.

Some examples of what this looks like practically may be...

Praying every morning, not as a duty you feel you must perform, but because you have a deep desire to have real conversations with a Father you trust.

Opening your Bible daily, not to earn God's favor but because you are hungry for His word.

Confessing sin not to re-earn salvation but because you know you are already forgiven but want to change an aspect of your behavior where you are still falling short.

Serving others not out of debt but out of the overflow of joy and gratitude for the gift of salvation you have already received.

Titus 3:5

not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

Here in the ESV version, we see the words “regeneration of the Holy Spirit”.

Regeneration is the process of renewal, regrowth or restoration of damaged tissues organs or organisms bringing them back to a functional improved or original state.

That is actually a scientific definition of the word, but it brings into perfect focus what regeneration in Christ Jesus is.

We are brought back to our original intended state of being in relationship to God and each other through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit when we receive the gift of the Gospel.

Now I am going to use another translation of Paul’s letter to Titus to bring into even sharper focus the work of the Holy Spirit that accompanies regeneration. The act of being “Born Again”.

Titus 3:4-6 NLT

When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, 5 he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. 6 He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Notice here the phrases “New Birth” and “New Life”.

These are described as the generosity of God through Christ by the Holy Spirit.

The gift of the gospel.

Father. Son. Holy Spirit. All in one. In you.

I want to leave you with three honest questions. These are not meant to produce anxiety. They are meant to help you locate yourself in the story of the gospel.

First: Have you genuinely repented?

Not: have you ever felt bad about something. But: has there been a moment — or a sustained movement — in your life where you recognized your sin before God, grieved over it, and genuinely turned?

Not toward self-improvement, but toward God himself?

If not, that is an invitation, not a condemnation. The door is open today.

Second: Is your faith resting on Christ alone?

If God were to ask you on the last day, 'Why should I let you in?' — what would your honest answer be?

If any part of your answer includes your own goodness, your religious effort, your church membership, or your moral record — that is not the gospel.

The gospel answer is: 'Because of what Jesus Christ has done for me.'

Third: Are you trusting Him today? For those who have come to faith: are you living in the freedom of that trust, or have you drifted into striving again?

Are you approaching God with the confidence of an adopted child and heir, or with the anxiety of someone trying to earn their place?

Christ has secured your standing. You can rest.

If you are a believer still burdened by guilt this scripture is for you:

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

If you are unsure where you stand... do not leave that question unanswered. Talk to someone today. Read the Gospel of John. Come as you are.

If you have never repented and believed... today is the day. Turn to Him with empty hands.

2 Corinthians 13:14

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Come to him. Turn to him. Trust him. He will not cast out any who come. Let's pray...