

John Holland

Session 1 | REPENTANCE

I. INTRODUCTION



“Now I saw in my dream that the highway Christian was to take was fenced in on both sides with a wall, and that wall was called Salvation. So burdened Christian ran up this path, but with great difficulty because of the load on his back. He ran until he came to an elevated place. There stood a cross, and a little below, at the bottom of the mount, a tomb carved into the rock. I saw in my dream that just as Christian approached the cross, his burden came loose from his shoulders, fell off his back, and began to tumble. It rolled down the hill until it came to the mouth

of the tomb, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then Christian was cheerful and glad, and said with a merry heart, ‘He has given me rest by his sorrow and life by his death.’ He stood still for a while to look and wonder, astonished that the sight of the cross should ease him of his burden. He looked and looked again, even when tears began to well up in his eyes and flow down his cheeks.”¹

“When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”²

¹ *The Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan

² Martin Luther, 95 Theses

II. WHAT REPENTANCE IS

Μετανοέω (*metanoeō*) - to change one's mind (and therefore way of life)

Watson - "Repentance is a grace of God's Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed."³

"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. Repentance means starting to live a new life."⁴

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 first word of the gospel is not 'love.' It is not even 'grace.' The first word of the gospel is 'repent.' From Matthew through the Revelation, repentance is an urgent and indispensable theme that is kept at the very forefront of the gospel message."⁵

Romans 2:4 - *"Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"*

Joel 2:12–13

³ *The Doctrine of Repentance* by Thomas Watson (Puritan Paperback), pg. 18.

⁴ Packer, *Concise Theology* pg. 162

⁵ *Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel* by Richard Owen Roberts, pg. 23.

*“‘Yet even now,’ declares the LORD,
‘return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
and rend your hearts and not your garments.’
Return to the LORD your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
and he relents over disaster.”*

Acts 5:31 - “God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”

Watson - “The two great graces essential to a saint in this life are faith and repentance. These are the two wings by which he flies to heaven.”⁶

CONVERSION

REDEEMED LIFE

⁶ *The Doctrine of Repentance* by Thomas Watson (Puritan Paperback), pg. 7.

Thomas Watson's 6 ingredients of the spiritual medicine of repentance:

1. Sight of sin

Psalm 51:3

*"For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me."*

2. Sorrow for sin

Psalm 51:17

*"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."*

3. Confession of sin

Psalm 32:5

*"I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,'
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin."*

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."*

James 5:16a - *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”*

Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 - *Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*

4. Shame for sin

Ezra 9:6 *“O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens.”*

Hebrews 12:1–2 - *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

5. Hatred for sin

“Christ is never loved till sin be loathed. Heaven is never longed for till sin be loathed.”⁷

⁷ *The Doctrine of Repentance* by Thomas Watson (Puritan Paperback), pg. 45.

6. Turning from sin

Acts 26:20 - *"...that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance."*

"Only when we turn away from looking at our own sin to look at the face of God, to find his pardoning grace, do we begin to repent. Only by seeing that there is grace and forgiveness with him would we ever dare to repent and thus return to the fellowship and presence of the Father."⁸

III. WHAT REPENTANCE ISN'T

Penance

1 John 1:2a - *"...[Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins..."*

Feelings of misery

2 Corinthians 7:10 - *"For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death."*

Resolution against sin

"Trust not a passionate resolution; it is raised in a storm and will die in a calm."⁹

⁸ *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction* by Sinclair Ferguson, pg. 75

⁹ *The Doctrine of Repentance* by Thomas Watson (Puritan Paperback), pg. 16.

IV. THREE EFFECTS OF REPENTANCE

1. Repentance sobers us

2. Repentance humbles us

3. Repentance returns us

“...it should be remembered that repentance in its full biblical sense is never perfectly exercised by us. When indeed do we totally turn from sin to God, and from the mind of the flesh to the mind of Christ? . . . Repentance is described in the Bible as a high ideal; we must continue to try to reveal it, but we shall never fully do so in this life. But, praise God, we are not saved by the perfection of our repentance. We are saved not by our meritorious acts but only by the merits of Christ.”¹⁰

Psalms of repentance for prayer:

- Psalm 6
- Psalm 32
- Psalm 38
- Psalm 51
- Psalm 130

¹⁰ *Saved by Grace* by Anthony Hoekema, pg. 131

Recommended resources:

- *The Doctrine of Repentance* by Thomas Watson
- *The Grace of Repentance* by Sinclair Ferguson
- *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction* by Sinclair Ferguson
- *Saved by Grace* by Anthony Hoekema
- *Be Thou My Vision* by Jonathan Gibson (and Gibson's other devotionals)
- *Conscience: What It Is, How to Train It, and Loving Those Who Differ* by Andrew David Naselli and J.D. Crowley

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