

What is True Repentance?

I. THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF REPENTANCE.

A. **REPENTANCE**: When a sinner repents, he turns from sin to God. He literally turns his life over to God out of reverence and love for God (1 Thess 1:9). His motivations for repenting will include the following:

- 1.) He will have a true sense of his sin; he will be grieved over it, and hate his sin.
- 2.) He will place his hope and confidence in the mercy of Christ; rather than in his ability to reform his ways (Acts 16:30-31).
- 3.) He will begin living a new life of obedience to God; he will go to war against the lusts of his flesh (Rom 8:12-13).

B. **The N.T. words for repentance.**

- 1.) **Metanoia** - a change of mind, to change one's mind for the better, to heartily amend one's ways out of abhorrence of one's past sins (Luke 10:13; Ps 51).
- 2.) **Epistrophei** - to turn to, to cause to return, to bring back, to turn one's self about, conversion, to turn from sin to God as one's life direction (Acts 9:35).

II. GOD'S GIFT OF SALVATION INCLUDES THE GIFT OF REPENTANCE.

A. **Faith and repentance are the necessary conditions of salvation.**

- 1.) Scripture asserts that even the ability to lay hold of salvation is a gift of divine Grace. Faith is granted by God to the elect (John 6:65, Ephesians 2:8-9, Philippians 1:29).
- 2.) Repentance also is granted by God's grace (2 Timothy 2:25, Acts 11:18)

B. **The message of repentance should always be joined to the Gospel of grace.**

- 1.) True repentance makes for a deep sense of the preciousness of the gospel. It prepares a man to hold fast to Jesus as Savior and sanctifier. It rejects all other foundations of trust and credits Christ with authorship of salvation.
- 2.) True repentance subjects the soul to Christ's lordship (Jn 20:28; Acts 2:21, 36; Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3).

- 3.) Faith and repentance are interdependent. Faith is permeated with repentance, and repentance with faith. In repenting, the believing sinner apprehends the perfect suitability of Christ for his sinner's ruined condition. The glory that floods the soul of the fully awakened person is that Christ's sufficiency as Savior perfectly answers the devastation sin has wreaked upon the man (1 Pet 2:24; 3:18; Acts 20:21; 17:30-31).

III. DISCERNING BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE REPENTANCE.

A. True repentance is God-centered, not man-centered.

- 1.) In true repentance, love to God is the necessary motive. Many temporarily turn from sin because of urging of loved ones. Lot's wife left Sodom at the urging of her husband. She left for love of her family, but her heart had never turned to God (Gen 19:12-26; Luke 17:32).
- 2.) In *counterfeit repentance* a person may rail against past acts of sin while at the same time continuing to make provision for the flesh (Rom 13:14).
- 3.) True repentance is ultimately aimed toward God, not toward the conscience (Acts 20:21). False repentance is not aimed at God; instead it is intended to 'bribe' or quiet the accusations of conscience.
- 4.) The "dead works" associated with false repentance cannot bring peace to the conscience. Only Christ's blood can cleanse the conscience (Heb 9:14).
- 5.) The hatred of all sin is a missing element in false repentance.
- 6.) In true repentance the believing sinner realizes that nothing can bring peace to the conscience but that which satisfies God's justice: *the death of Christ* (Isaiah 53:4-5, 10-12).

B. True repentance is inseparably joined to faith.

- 1.) False repentance exists apart from faith. It flows from unbelief (what a man can do).
- 2.) Faith's object is the person and work of Christ. A person who has not yet repented still trusts his own religious duties and reforms. His religious efforts are preoccupied with self instead of Christ and His sufficiency (Luke 18:9-14).

C. False repentance avoids the cross of Christ.

- 1.) False repentance resists Christ's atonement by seeking to become 'an atonement itself'. False repentance is like a band-aid placed upon a corpse (Matthew 13:19-23).

Nothing short of a spiritual resurrection (regeneration) can effect the needed change (Eph 2:1-5; Col 2:13-14).

- 2.) In true repentance, a person gives glory to God by fully acknowledging what his sin deserves. “No man, indeed, ever arrived to any just view of his sins by the mere process of human reasoning, or by anything short of the illuminating and convincing power of God’s Spirit” (Gardiner Spring).

D. False repentance mistakes “sorrow” for true repentance.

- 1.) The unsaved man secretly quarrels with the verdict of the law and with God’s right to judge him. In that self-vindicating state, he will not accept the gospel. If he thinks he may ‘patch himself up’ and placate God; he will not abandon his case to Christ. A person engaged in false repentance never repents of unbelief (his refusal to trust Christ alone for salvation).
- 2.) False repentance has a kind of sorrow. Paul refers to it as “the sorrow of the world,” (2 Corinthians 7:10). Worldly sorrow is self-centered.
- 3.) The godly sorrow of true repentance is centered in God’s unchanging holiness.

E. True repentance is inseparable from faith in Christ.

- 1.) The true repenter takes all the blame for his sin then looks to Christ. He resolves to leave off all sin and he expects to find mercy. He condemns himself, he vindicates God (fully agrees with God’s charges against him), he looks with reliance upon the free grace offered in Christ.
- 2.) The true repenter knows God is ready and willing to forgive. Repentance is joined to this confidence in Christ. When the prodigal began his journey home, he thought upon his father’s love. Desire for his father’s love, mercy, and favor was not diminished by the knowledge of his father’s ways and rules (Luke 15:17-21).

F. True repentance loves God’s holiness.

- 1.) True repentance is accompanied by a sight of the beauty of God’s holiness and the desirability of the life of holiness. The true repenter is burdened by his failure to keep God’s law (Ps 119:136).
- 2.) Since true repentance is absolutely essential to salvation, the question may arise concerning its relationship to saving faith. Must the sinner exercise true repentance in order to have a right to take Christ as Savior? The answer begins with the understanding that Scripture joins faith and repentance together. They are granted at the

same point of time in regeneration (Zechariah 12:10, Mark 1:5).

- 3.) Repentance is not offered to God apart from believing. Should a man wonder if he has repented thoroughly enough to have a right to Christ? This is to separate repentance from faith. Though the two are distinct, they are inseparable (Rom 15:13).

IV. THE ROLE OF THE LAW AND CONVICTION OF SIN IN REPENTANCE.

- A. **No man despairs of his own righteousness and efforts without a radical vision of his sin.** It is convicted sinners who see they are liable to divine wrath. Only those convicted by the Holy Spirit see their need of the Savior (Luke 18:13-14).
- B. **The law is a ‘schoolmaster’ to bring men to Christ through repentance (Gal 3:24).** True repentance is designed to make the heart loathe sin. By design it moves a man to take a violent stand against himself (to take God’s side against his sin).
- C. **Salvation is not just from the consequences of sin, but from sin itself.**
Those who will be saved through Christ must repent of sin if they are to be saved from it. They will be saved by way of a strong hatred of sin and an intense desire to be delivered from sin. They will crush the idols in their life (Rom 6:21-23).
- D. **Repentance issues forth in a changed mind, heart and life.**
1.) True repentance renews the intellect, the affections, and the will to trust and obey the Lord.
2.) Scripture asserts that repentance produces radical change in all three areas; the *mind* (Matthew 3:2, Mark 1:15); the *heart* (Matthew 21:29,32, Hebrews 7:21); the *will* (Matthew 3:8; 9:13; Acts 20:21).
- E. **Repentance preserves the truth of God’s purposes in the world: *He is purifying for Himself a people for His own possession* (Titus 2:14).**

V. THE SEVEN MARKS OF TRUE REPENTANCE.

- A. **A renewed heart that always leads to hatred of sin and a changed behavior.**
- B. **A deep sorrow for sin accompanied by caution about falling into sin.**
- C. **A lifestyle of ongoing repentance and confession of sin.**
- D. **A turning from sin to God in obedience and service.**
- E. **A willingness to make restitution where applicable.**
- F. **A life direction characterized by permanent fruitfulness.**

G. A realization that repentance is never perfect in this life.

QUESTIONS:

(I.A.) 1.) When you trusted Christ for salvation, what motivations did you have for repenting of your sin?

(II.A.) 2.) Does repentance come solely from the sinner; or is the ability to repent granted by God's grace? How does this affect the effort God requires of us to repent?

(II.B.) 3.) Is true repentance primarily preoccupied with *trying to do better*; or is it primarily focused on Jesus Christ as Savior? Which emphasis describes your life?

(II.B.) 4.) Why are faith and repentance never found separate from one another?

(III.A) 5.) What's wrong with trying to 'quiet the conscience'? Why is trying to quiet the conscience a sign of false repentance? What is God's way to a clear conscience?

(III.B-C, E.) 6.) When a person truly repents, what are they looking to as their source of trust, reliance, and hope?

(III.D.) 7.) Some people mistake regret, remorse, and sorrow for true repentance. Though true repentance contains these attitudes, sorrow alone is not true repentance. Why?

(III. E-F) 8.) Must a person repent of sin to the best of his ability before he has a right to trust in Christ? Why or why not?

(IV.A-D) 9.) What is the role of the Law and the Spirit in the sinner's repentance?

(V.) 10.) Read over *the seven marks of repentance*. Which marks describe your new life in Christ? Which of the marks are lacking in your life?

11.) Read Ephesians 5:8-14. What evidences of true repentance described in this passage would be absent in false repentance? Why?

12.) Explain why repentance ought to make a true believer open to exhortation with a willingness to humbly receive correction (see Prov 9:8; 10:8; 27:6; 28:23; Ps 141:5). Does that willingness to be corrected characterize your life?

13.) Not only is a true sense of sin a root of all true repentance, but also the apprehension of mercy. Select one of the following passages and locate the words and phrases which hold out hope of mercy to the person who repents (Ps 130; Joel 2:12, 13; Jer. 3:12-14; Is 55:7).

14.) Read Psalm 139:23, 24. Describe the Psalmist's willingness to have God's holiness intrude upon his heart (Ps 139:23, 24). Why is the Psalmist's attitude a mark of true repentance? Is this attitude found in your prayers?