

### **The Unconverted “Believer” (20): Biblical Repentance**

Let us begin this morning with reading a passage of Scripture that sets before us the entire history of the human race from its initial fall in Adam to its ultimate subjection unto God the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ. These are Paul’s inspired words of 1 Corinthians 15:20 through 28, in which he set forth the life and work of Jesus Christ on behalf of His Father in subduing and reconciling the fallen world through His death, resurrection, and present reign over the kingdom of God as its Lord, or King.

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.<sup>1</sup> <sup>21</sup>For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup>For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. <sup>23</sup>But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. <sup>24</sup>Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. <sup>25</sup>For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. <sup>26</sup>The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. <sup>27</sup>For “He has put all things under His feet.” But when He says “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. <sup>28</sup>Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. 15:20-28)<sup>2</sup>

Paul set forth Jesus Christ as the first among His people who was resurrected from the dead, after His crucifixion and burial in His garden tomb. He is the first who was raised of all those who belong to Him, for they, too, will one day come forth in their resurrection from the dead. They will not be raised until His second coming, which will signal the end of human history, for when He appears, “then comes the end.” He will have accomplished the full expansion and completion of His kingdom. This implies, of course, that He was coronated and His kingdom was inaugurated upon His resurrection and ascension into heaven. At His second coming and the resurrection of all of the citizens of His kingdom, He will present His kingdom to His Father, for He will have accomplished the purpose for which the Father had sent Him into the world. He will have conquered all of God’s enemies, having brought all things into willing submission to His Father. Whereas the entire world had rebelled from God in Adam’s sin, because of which they all reject God as their king who had created them, the Lord Jesus had recovered His people from their fall, brought them into subjection unto Himself, and in the end will present them unto His Father as loving, devoted, committed citizens of His kingdom. Although the unsaved are not specifically mentioned here, of course they, too, will be brought into subjection through His defeat of them and His judgment of them, at which time they will bow on the knee and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father (cf. Phil 2:9-11).

The subject that we are addressing this morning is that of repentance. How does repentance fit into our understanding this great work of God in history of reconciling the world to Himself? In the beginning Adam and Eve led the way in rejecting God their Creator as their rightful king. They had embraced the lie of the devil and insisted on becoming their own lords--gods unto themselves, rather than order their thinking and actions according to God’s law that He had established before them. But God purposed and promised to call forth His blessed Son to establish a mediatorial kingdom, in which its believing citizens would be pardoned of

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<sup>1</sup> “Asleep” is a euphemism of Christians who have physically died and their bodies are resting in their graves until the day of the resurrection.

<sup>2</sup> Reading and understanding this passage in context reflects the historic understanding of the end times held by many reformed Christians through history. This passage clearly depicts Jesus Christ as the present reigning King over His present kingdom in this age, which comes to an end at a single, final return of Jesus Christ at which time the final resurrection of the dead will take place and then the completed kingdom given by Christ unto the Father. There is no way to read into this passage a two-stage second coming of Christ, two separate kingdoms of Christ respecting His church and the nation of Israel, a future earthly 1,000 year Jewish millennium, and a judgment of the unsaved occurring over 1,000 years after an earlier resurrection of Christians.

their sin and reconciled to God through Him. Our initial repentance from sin through faith in Jesus Christ was our willingness and purpose to turn from our self-ordered existence and submit unto Jesus our Lord and Savior. We came to see, believe, and transfer our allegiance to Jesus Christ as our Lord, as our king, having entered His kingdom through our new birth (regeneration). And then after having become citizens of the kingdom of God in which Jesus Christ is our King (Lord), our on-going repentance as Christians is our humble acknowledgment and turning from sin that we have committed against our Lord and Savior. Repentance is a fruit of our having been regenerated (born again) by God and it is a manifestation of our saving faith in Him as our Lord and Savior. It is, therefore, through our initial repentance and faith in Jesus Christ our Lord that God had initially pardoned us of our sin and that we became compliant and committed citizens of the kingdom of God. And it is through our on-going repentance from sin that we manifest our profession that He is our Lord and we are His citizens.

Now in our current series in which we are addressing the problem of nominal Christianity, we have mentioned the importance of repentance rather frequently. But we have not addressed the subject very directly or forthrightly, explaining in some detail what the Word of God teaches about repentance and how the grace of repentance is wrought in the heart and life of the Lord's people. I believe that there are many nominal Christians in evangelical churches who have false assurance of their salvation because they have not experienced or manifested what the Bible sets forth respecting repentance and how it touches on biblical salvation. I also believe that many true Christians are troubled and do struggle without the sound assurance of their salvation for they misunderstand what the Bible teaches about the on-going life of repentance that is the experience of every true child of God. I pray that today's study will clarify these matters to us. May the Holy Spirit guide us and help each of us to understand and believe the words of Holy Scripture respecting repentance that leads unto life (cf. Acts 11:18).

## I. The meaning of biblical repentance

The Greek word translated into English by the word "repentance" is **μετάνοιας** (*metanoias*). It literally means "to change one's mind." It describes the great change in the heart and thinking of someone who turns from sin and embraces Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. Repentance is the turning of one's understanding and conviction from one way of thinking and living into another way, so that the entire aim and direction of life is transformed.

Now sadly there are those who deny that biblical repentance has to do with turning from sin unto a life of faith and obedience to God in Jesus Christ. They say that *metanoia* (repentance) simply describes the change of one's belief of who Jesus is. They say that biblical repentance occurs when the sinner, who had no understanding or belief in the deity of Jesus Christ, came to understand and believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ. They deny that repentance involves turning from sin, but say it is only changing your opinion regarding the person of Jesus Christ. This is the position of classical dispensationalists.<sup>3</sup> About half of all evangelicals in America believe this errant understanding of biblical repentance. In many efforts to proclaim the gospel in our world today, this aberrant view of repentance is proclaimed. Sinners are urged to believe on Jesus, but nothing is declared to them that they must turn from their sin and submit to Jesus the Lord. This is a false gospel of salvation. The Bible teaches no such thing. This kind of thing is what **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** (1906-1945) called "cheap grace", and it is a common teaching in our land, even in our world. Cheap grace offers forgiveness of sins without repentance from sin. It was **William Booth** (1829-1912), the founder of the Salvation Army, who was prescient when he said, "The greatest danger to Christianity in the next century is promising forgiveness where there is no repentance."

**Charles Spurgeon** (1834-1892) once addressed this errant view of repentance that had even existed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote these words:

Together with undivided faith in Jesus Christ there must also be *unfeigned repentance of sin*. Repentance is an old-fashioned word, not much used by modern revivalists. "Oh!" said a minister to me,

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<sup>3</sup> These include men such as C. I. Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chaffer, who was the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, Chuck Swindoll and many others. It is a false gospel to tell people that they can have salvation from sin apart from repenting of sin and turning in submission to Jesus the Lord.

one day, “it only means a change of mind.” This was thought to be a profound observation. “Only a change of mind”; but what a change! A change of mind with regard to everything! Instead of saying, “It is only a change of mind,” it seems to me more truthful to say it is a great and deep change—even a change of the mind itself. But whatever the literal Greek word may mean, repentance is no trifle. You will not find a better definition of it than the one given in the children’s hymn:—

“Repentance is to leave  
The sins we loved before  
And show that we in earnest grieve,  
By doing so no more.”

True conversion is in all men attended by a sense of sin, which we have spoken of under the head of conviction; by a sorrow for sin, or holy grief at having committed it; by a hatred of sin, which proves that its dominion is ended; and by a practical turning from sin, which shows that the life within the soul is operating upon the life without. True belief and true repentance are twins: it would be idle to attempt to say which is born first. All the spokes of a wheel move at once when the wheel moves, and so all the graces commence action when regeneration is wrought by the Holy Ghost. Repentance, however, there must be. No sinner looks to the Saviour with a dry eye or a hard heart. Aim, therefore, at heart-breaking, at bringing home condemnation to the conscience, and weaning the mind from sin, and be not content till the whole mind is deeply and vitally changed in reference to sin.<sup>4</sup>

Repentance is a work that is born of faith and must be present if true saving faith is present. More specifically, what does biblical repentance look like? First, let us describe **what it is not: (1) Repentance is not simply acknowledging you are a sinner.** Pharaoh did that much, as we read in Exodus 9:27: “Then Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, ‘I have sinned this time; the Lord is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones.’” This is the kind of “repentance” generated by *a hard heart*. **(2) Repentance is not simply acknowledging you are a sinner and are fearful because of judgment.** Demons do that much. They declared before Jesus, “What do I have to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me” (Luke 8:28). This is the kind of “repentance” that can be generated by *an evil heart*. **(3) Repentance is not merely acknowledging you are a sinner and being sorry for it.** Judas Iscariot did this much. This is the kind of “repentance” that can be generated from a *regretful heart*.

**What, then, is true repentance?** Biblical repentance is acknowledging sin and turning from it. And further, repentance is present when you try and undo what you have done to harm others; that is, you make restitution. We read of this in Luke 19:8, in which Zacchaeus said, “Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.” Jesus responded to him: “Today salvation has come to this house.”

Biblical repentance involves these elements: **(1) True repentance involves a full turning toward God.** We forsake former attitudes about God, and we begin to submit to His rule, striving to live before Him in righteousness. We cease our rebellion. We capitulate—surrender. We cast down the weapons of our former warfare against Him and sue for peace. **(2) We adopt new attitudes and ways towards God.** We worship Him. We look to Him for guidance. We love Him and seek to honor Him. **(3) True repentance involves a full believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. True repentance involves a commitment** of one’s life to follow Him and to obey all of His commands. There is a commitment to learn of Him and His ways as set forth in the Bible. In other words, there is an acknowledgment and surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all of life. The false teachers referred to in Jude’s epistle denied the Lordship of Christ, even while they promised salvation. But the Scriptures make it clear that there is no salvation for those who do not repent/turn from their sins. Repentance from sin is absolutely essential to a sound hope of eternal life. Again, Spurgeon once wrote:

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Spurgeon, **The Soul Winner** (Pilgrim Publications).

As long as God lives, there can be no promise of mercy to those who continue in their evil ways and refuse to acknowledge their wrongdoing. Surely no rebel can expect the King to pardon his treason while he remains in open revolt...

...Repentance and forgiveness are joined together in the experience of all believers. There never was a person who unfeignedly repented of sin with believing repentance that was not forgiven. On the other hand, there never was a person forgiven who had not repented of his sin. I do not hesitate to say that beneath heaven there never was, there is not, and there never will be any case of sin being washed away unless at the same time the heart was led to repentance and faith in Christ.<sup>5</sup>

It is important we affirm that our repentance does not contribute to our justification before God. Our faith Christ alone brings us into the state of justification. But the same faith that savingly believes on Christ, sincerely turns from sin to Christ. True faith and good works will always be found together.

**Thomas Watson** (1620-1686) wrote a very good book entitled, *The Doctrine of Repentance*. In describing the nature of repentance he wrote:

I shall show what gospel repentance is. Repentance is a grace of God's Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed. For a further amplification, know that repentance is a spiritual medicine made up of six ingredients:

1. Sight of sin
2. Sorrow for sin
3. Confession of sin
4. Shame for sin
5. Hatred for sin
6. Turning from sin

If anyone is left out it loses its virtue.<sup>6</sup>

A Scottish pastor, **John Colquhoun** (1748-1827) wrote a book entitled, *Evangelical Repentance*. He wrote these words:

The repentance then which is in the New testament required of sinners is such an entire change of mind, or of views and sentiments respecting sin and salvation, as discovers itself by a genuine sorrow for sin, a firm resolution to hate and forsake it, and a sincere endeavour so to return to God in Christ as to walk with Him in newness of life: the sincerity of which is to be evidenced in fruits meet (fitting) for repentance.<sup>7</sup>

Now when we consider the matter of repentance, we must understand the nature of, and the distinction between, the repentance of a guilty sinner turning to Christ in initial saving faith from the repentance of the true Christian exercising repentance from sin throughout life. Let us consider these two forms of repentance and how they may be distinguished from one another. First, let us consider...

## II. Our Initial repentance unto salvation

There are a number of places in the New Testament in which repentance is set forth as the action of a sinner who turns from his life of sin unto submission to the Messiah, that is, the promised king of Israel. This initial act of repentance results in bringing that believing sinner to receive salvation from sin. The Synoptic

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *All of Grace* (Whitaker House, 1983), pp. 100,102.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1668), p. 18. Watson then explained each of these 6 qualities of true repentance in detail.

<sup>7</sup> John Colquhoun, *Repentance* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965, orig. 1826), p. 27.K

Gospels<sup>8</sup> begin the story of Jesus Christ ministering to His people through the pronouncement and commandment of John the Baptist for the Jewish people to repent of their sins. John's message was simple and clear. He proclaimed, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven (God) is at hand." Here are the words of Matthew respecting John and his proclamation:

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, <sup>2</sup>and saying, "**Repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" <sup>3</sup>For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.'"

<sup>4</sup>Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup>Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him <sup>6</sup>and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

<sup>7</sup>But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup>Therefore bear fruits worthy of **repentance**, <sup>9</sup>and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. <sup>10</sup>And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>11</sup>I indeed baptize you with water unto **repentance**, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>12</sup>His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Matt. 3:1-12)

John only baptized those who believed his message that the promised kingdom of God was about to be inaugurated and that anyone and everyone who desired to enter that kingdom must acknowledge and turn from their sins.

After King Herod had John arrested, the public ministry of Jesus of Nazareth formally began in Galilee. We read in Matthew 4 that Jesus proclaimed the same message of repentance that John had declared before Him. Here is **Matthew 4:12-17**:

<sup>12</sup>Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. <sup>13</sup>And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, <sup>14</sup>that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:

<sup>15</sup>"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,  
By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,  
Galilee of the Gentiles:

<sup>16</sup>The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light,  
And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death  
Light has dawned."

<sup>17</sup>From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "**Repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Throughout His earthly ministry Jesus proclaimed the need of repentance from sin in order to enter the kingdom of God, which was to be understood as the realm of salvation for the people of God.<sup>9</sup> The people who heard Jesus knew that His message was a proclamation of the soon arrival of the promised king. They did not immediately recognize Jesus to be that king, nor did Jesus make a public confession of His true identity. But when the people heard His message, they were convicted of their own sinfulness and their need to turn from their sin and purpose to live holy lives with view to the promised king's arrival and inauguration.

Jesus spoke of repentance throughout His earthly ministry. In Matthew 9:13 we read the words of our Lord, "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the

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<sup>8</sup> The Synoptic Gospels include Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Luke 13:1-5

righteous, *but sinners, to repentance.*” And then after His cross and His resurrection, Jesus told His disciples to preach repentance to all the nations.

Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, <sup>47</sup>and that *repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations*, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>And you are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup>Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” (Luke 24:46-49)

In the book of Acts we read that the message of repentance continued to be proclaimed whenever the gospel was preached. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter pronounced to the gathered Jewish crowds in Jerusalem their responsibility to repent of their sins and to believe on Jesus Christ as the enthroned promised Messiah, the Son of David. Peter declared, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” God had inaugurated His kingdom that He had promised Israel, having installed the crucified and resurrected Son of David as its king (cf. Ps. 2). The people’s response was great conviction of their sin. Verse 37 reads, “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’” We then read in the next two verses:

Then Peter said to them, “*Repent*, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ *for the remission of sins*; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

A short time later Peter again proclaimed in that city, “*Repent* therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). Eventually Peter declared the gospel to the gathered Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. Afterward, Peter recounted his ministry among those Gentiles to the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem. They then drew a conclusion: “When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles *repentance* to life’ (Acts 11:18).

All of these passages that we read clearly present the importance and centrality of repentance in the proclamation of the gospel in order to bring people to salvation through Jesus Christ. Repentance unto salvation involves the sinner coming to understand the nature and importance of the kingdom of God over which God’s Son, Jesus Christ, became King when He ascended into heaven after His cross and resurrection from the dead. Biblical repentance unto salvation involves a sinner turning from having formerly lived in disregard and transgression of God’s laws. Fallen man had lived as though he were the king over his own kingdom. But at his conversion he laments having lived in independence and rebellion to God, who is the rightful Ruler over His creation. In saving repentance he turns from his former belief and practice that he was the lord of his own life, one who thought that he was free to order his life according to his own will. In repentance from his sin, he believes and submits to Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. In repentance he changes from a rebel toward God into a devout and loyal, submissive and compliant, citizen of the kingdom of God over which Jesus Christ is King. Biblical repentance unto salvation is tied to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the enthroned King, to whom all who would be saved from their sin acknowledge, confess, and submit. This is why the gospel is referred to as the gospel of the kingdom of God in the New Testament.<sup>10</sup>

Repentance is the fruit of regeneration (the new birth) that the Holy Spirit works in the soul of the sinner that God has purposed to save. It is a manifestation of justifying faith in Jesus Christ. Many Christians trouble themselves about the grace of God in justification because they think that *until* they repent, God will not forgive them of their sins. In other words they believe there must be a change in their life before they can savingly believe on Christ. But this is wrong. We are first to believe on Christ as sinners, embrace the promise of the gospel that God forgives us of our sin and reckons Christ’s righteousness to us as believing sinners. God’s promise is that He justifies the *ungodly*. God has written “But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness” (Rom. 4:5). Repentance

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<sup>10</sup> C. Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; Mark 1:14.

then flows forth from that believer as a further evidence of the grace of regeneration or the new birth that had brought him to faith. Therefore, both saving faith and repentance from sin are the fruit of regeneration that God had sovereignly wrought in the soul, the one God purposed to save from his sin and translate him into the kingdom of God. John Colquhoun, whom we quoted earlier, included as his last chapter in his book on repentance this theme: “The priority of justification to the first exercise of true repentance.” In other words, faith precedes and leads to true repentance. Because we had come to believe what God said about us as sinners living in defiance and rebellion, and that there was mercy and grace to pardon us in Jesus Christ, we believed on Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, and that same regenerating grace that brought us to faith in Christ, leads us to repent of our sin and embrace and submit to Jesus Christ the Lord. True repentance is the outworking of the saving faith of a guilty, wretched sinner.

### III. The blessings that are ours through our repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ our Lord

Now it is critically important to understand and embrace what happened to us, or rather, what happened on our behalf, when we first repented of our sin and we believed on Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Of course through our faith alone in Christ *God justified us by His grace*. What is justification? The Westminster Shorter Catechism addressed it this way:

Question 33. What is justification?

Answer. Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

God declared that He had reconciled us unto Himself. He counted or reckoned our sins to have been born by Christ on His cross, who had paid our debt to God’s justice. Upon our faith God began to regard us as righteous as His own dear Son, for the righteousness of Jesus Christ was granted to us freely as a gift of His grace (Rom. 5:17). In our justification, we came into a state of peace with God in that our former hostility to Him and His former hostility toward us had come to an end. We also were brought to a place in which we could anticipate the promise of God glorifying us one day when He brings us to life on the day of the resurrection. Romans 5:1 and 2 read, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Our justification before God which occurred once for all time will never be rescinded by God nor can it ever be forfeited by us. We are at peace with God and He is at peace with us. That is a secure, eternal reality that can never be lost or forfeited by the Christian.

But not only did God justify us upon our faith in Jesus the Lord, but *He adopted us into His family—the family of God*. God became our Father and we became His sons and daughters as co-equal heirs of the glory that He had promised His Son. He would inherit all things. And we will also share in this inheritance as joint heirs with Christ of all things (Rom. 8:17).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, <sup>4</sup>just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, <sup>5</sup>having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:3-6)

But in addition, when God justified us through faith in Christ, *God changed in the way in which we related to His law*. The believer’s relationship to God’s law underwent a monumental change. Through the death of Jesus Christ and our union with Him in His death, we were delivered from the capability of God’s law to condemn us. Before we were in Christ, the law of God condemned us. We had been under God’s law and its sentence of eternal death was upon us. But when Jesus Christ was condemned on His cross and thereby satisfied the demands of God’s justice in His law, we were enabled to come into union with Jesus Christ. And so, after through faith in Jesus Christ we were delivered from the ability of the law of God to condemn us. Paul reasoned in this way in Romans 7:1ff.

Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? <sup>2</sup>For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. <sup>3</sup>So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. <sup>4</sup>Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. <sup>5</sup>For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. <sup>6</sup>But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

For the one who had initially repented of sin, who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, the law of God can no longer, in fact, it can never ever bring him into condemnation. The law did not die, but as a Christian, through your union with Jesus Christ in His death, you died with regard to your former relationship to the law. Before faith, the law of God condemned your soul. But because the death of Jesus Christ satisfied the full demands of the law of God in that He bore the punishment of God's law upon you, you are now fully and wholly free from the authority of God's law to condemn you. This is why Paul could later write in Romans 8:31ff:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? <sup>33</sup>Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. <sup>35</sup>Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written:

“For Your sake we are killed all day long;  
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

<sup>37</sup>Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, <sup>39</sup>nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:31-38)

Paul wrote in Romans 8:1f, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” Here are the words of **John Murray** on this verse:

“Condemnation” is the opposite of justification (cf. 5:16; 8:34) and justification implies the absence of condemnation. Since the justification which is the theme of this epistle is the complete and irreversible justification of the ungodly, it carries with it the annulment of all condemnation. This is the thought of verse 1—the negative bears the emphasis. The “therefore” means that this complete absence of condemnation is an inference from what precedes.

If you are in Christ, then sin cannot condemn you. Your sin can grieve you and grieve God, but it cannot condemn you, for you had initially repented of your sin when you abandoned and rejected being lord of your own life and you submitted and committed in faith to order your life with Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Your sin may incur God's displeasure and His chastening action upon you, which is designed to lead you to repentance, but your sin can never again incur God's curse and condemnation. No sin can condemn your soul to hell, for you are justified in Christ.

But also, when God justified us through faith, *God brought us into a state in which He can and will deliver us from our sin by enabling us to live in righteousness.* Here in Romans 8:1 and 2 Paul wrote that the



believer having been justified is no longer under condemnation because Christ was condemned in his place. But Paul also argues that the believer is no longer under condemnation for the Lord is able to enable the believer to live in righteousness, that is, in conformity to the righteousness of the law through the Holy Spirit that He has given to Him. In other words, not only are you not under condemnation because God had justified you, but also because He is now sanctifying you through the power of the Holy Spirit that He has given you. Here is the larger context of Romans 8:1ff:

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...<sup>11</sup> <sup>2</sup>For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup>For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup>that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. <sup>5</sup>For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. <sup>7</sup>Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. <sup>8</sup>So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

<sup>9</sup>But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. <sup>10</sup>And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup>But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Before our initial repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, we were both unwilling and incapable of submitting to God our Creator and the King over His creation. “The carnal mind”, that is, the mind of the non-Christian, “is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). The law of God was objectionable to us. We viewed it as stifling and enslaving. To order one’s life according to its precepts was not only unappealing to us, but distasteful to us. But that all changed when God regenerated us by the Holy Spirit. He put new and holy desires within us. And the Lord promised that He would give the gift of the Holy Spirit to them who obeyed Him (Acts 5:32), whereby they would be empowered to order their thinking and their living according to the righteous requirements of God’s laws.

Now having considered in some measure our initial repentance unto salvation and God’s blessings that we received and enjoy through our faith, let us consider the nature of repentance in the life of the Christian, the one who is in Christ Jesus.

#### **IV. Repentance in the life of the true Christian**

The Christian initially repented of his sin when he first trusted and submitted to Jesus Christ the Lord. But because we had at one time repented when we came initially came to Christ, does that mean that the matter is complete? No, in no way. Repentance is not a one-time act, but a lifelong practice. Christians are a repenting people. The first of the 95 theses of **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) that had initiated the Protestant Reformation spoke to this:

When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent”, He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

As the Christians continues to commit sins—“For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin” (Ecc. 7:20), or when strayings and defections occur, and the Holy Spirit brings to mind these

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<sup>11</sup> The last clause in verse 1 in the KJV and the NKJV was not original with Paul, but added by a much later scribe while making a copy of the text. He no doubt mistakenly looked to the words of verse 4 and mistakenly included them also at the end of verse 1. Once he had introduced this variant into his manuscript, it became repeated in subsequent copies of texts through the centuries until it was translated by the KJV translators.

things, we repent afresh. Repentance is the way of life for the Christian. If we are Christians, we must (and we will) turn from sin toward God as we are confronted with the truth of Scripture.

Again, if any think that they can be a true Christian and not repent of sin when confronted with it, consider the following verses given to *churches* by the Lord Jesus Himself:

**Revelation 2:5:** “Remember then from what 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.”

**Revelation 2:16f.** “Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. <sup>16</sup>*Repent*, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. <sup>17</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

**Revelation 2:20.** “Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup>And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. <sup>22</sup>Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, *unless they repent of their deeds.*”

**Revelation 3:3:** “Remember then what you received and heard; keep that, and *repent*. If you will not awake, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.”

**Revelation 3:19.** “As many as I love, I reprove and chasten: be zealous therefore, and *repent.*”

We see that repentance--turning from sin to God--is not merely an act of the non-Christian in order to become a Christian, but it is the responsibility of us all. God commands all men that they should all everywhere repent, inasmuch as “He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom he hath ordained; whereof he has given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”

But the repentance that the Christian exhibits is to be distinguished from our initial repentance when we first came to Christ for salvation. As Christians we do not repent before God for He is the Judge who will condemn us if we fail to do so, but because He is our Father for whom we desire to please and because we are grieved when we grieve Him. Further, when we repent as Christians we do not do so in doubt of our justification by God through faith in Jesus Christ, but we should do so while confident and affirming of our justification that God Himself effected on our behalf when we first believed the gospel and that He swore would be our standing before Him for eternity. And so, it is not out of fear of damnation, but out of a sincere sense of humility and shame that we have so sinned against such a good and merciful Father. But further, we repent as Christians not in order to regain or recover our relationship with Him, but that we would restore our sense and the joy that our knowledge of that relationship may bring us when we are walking in faith and fellowship with Him. And certainly when we repent of sin, we should do so with a conscious awareness of precisely wherein we had sinned against Him and His will as set forth in the Holy Scriptures. Moreover, when we repent, we should do so with a fresh and renewed appreciation of the grace and merit of Jesus Christ who secured our salvation from sin for us and who assures our restoration to our Father through His intercession on our behalf as our faithful and compassionate High Priest in heaven before His Father’s throne. And lastly, as we repent asking and trusting God to forgive us our sins and restore us to full fellowship with Him (1 John 1:9), we are to pray to Him to give us a fresh bestowal of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit so that we not yield further to that sin or to continue in it.

## V. The problem and prevalence of false repentance

The King James Version speaks of a “repentance” that needed to be repented of, in other words, the Holy Scriptures was addressing a false repentance that did not save from sin. Here is the KJV translation of 2 Corinthians 7:10: “For godly sorrow worketh *repentance to salvation not to be repented of*: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.” Paul was teaching the nature of true repentance. In doing so, he contrasted a

sorrow of the world with godly sorrow, a worldly, false repentance, with true repentance. Here is the passage in the English Standard Version (ESV):

<sup>8</sup>For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. <sup>9</sup>As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.

<sup>10</sup>For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. <sup>11</sup>For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter. (2 Cor. 7:8-11)

There is much misunderstanding about the nature of true repentance. One reason for this is that many people believe that much repentance which is actually false repentance is true repentance. ***There is a false repentance that does not save.*** In many ways it can appear like true repentance, but it falls short. People need to be undeceived about this. And so, let us give our attention to what the Bible describes and depicts to be false repentance. False repentance, too, has certain elements.

**1. False repentance is selective of what sins are forsaken.** The Scriptures describe even **Herod** as one who “heard John gladly and did any things” (Mark 6:20). But Herod would not repent of his adultery with Herodias. **Simon Magus** would turn from *magic*, but *covetousness* reigned still in his soul. And although he is described as having “believed” and was baptized, Peter declared him yet to be in his sins being “full of bitterness and captive to sin” (Acts 8:9-23).

**2. False repentance will acknowledge wrongdoing but at the same time justify the action.** He makes his sin out to be an error of judgment—“a mistake”—perhaps due to poor judgment or a measure of weakness. But he fails to acknowledge it as it is—a crime against God and a transgression of His law.

King Saul will serve us well as an example. In 1 Samuel 13 we read that King Saul sinned by intruding into the priestly duty of offering sacrifice. Only legitimate priests from the tribe of Levi were to offer sacrifices to God on behalf of others. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin. Saul committed a great crime before God when he acted as a priest in sacrificing to God. But when confronted by Samuel concerning his sin, consider his reaction:

And Saul said, “When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, <sup>12</sup>then I said, ‘The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD.’ Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering.”

Saul justified himself in transgressing God’s commandment. In his mind he could not have done otherwise. But for this sin, God deposed Saul from his throne over Israel.

**3. False repentance is when one turns from sin because it is *painful*, not because it is *sinful*.** Again, King Saul may be cited as an example. Rather than confessing his guiltiness, he attempted to justify himself (1 Sam. 13:15, 20-21). But after Samuel reproached him and declared the consequences of his sin, look at Saul’s change of attitude: (v. 24). But this was not true repentance. He was merely afraid of the consequences of his sin. He was not concerned about the sin itself.

**4. False repentance *exchanges* one sin for another.** Whereas before one “repented”, he might have had *immorality* dominating his heart, but now, after he supposedly repented, *pride* reigns. This is not repentance unto life.

**5. False repentance may be discovered if it is only a *temporary* repentance.** True repentance is a **permanent**, or at least a *renewed* repentance. But false repentance is temporary. The false teachers of 2 Peter 2 had “repented” to a degree. They had even cleaned up their lives quite significantly. But it was temporary. Being unconverted they returned to their old sinful ways.

**6. False repentance may be discovered if it is only an *external* repentance;** that is, if it is not a turning of the heart from sin to serve the living God.

This matter of repentance is extremely important and deserves much attention in these days, not only because it is not being widely talked about, but also because there is a false repentance that in so many ways appears to be true repentance. True repentance is essential for salvation. We must be right about this matter! I will conclude this matter of what is repentance with these words from Charles Spurgeon regarding false repentance:

Does repentance make men hate sin? They who have a false repentance may detest some crimes. Does repentance make men resolve that they will not sin? So will this false repentance; for Balaam said, "If Barak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I will not go beyond the word of the Lord." Does true repentance make men humble themselves? So does false repentance; for Ahab humbled himself before God, and yet he perished. There is a line of distinction so fine, that an eagle's eye hath not seen it, and only God Himself, and the soul which is enlightened with His Spirit, can tell whether the repentance be genuine or no.<sup>12</sup>

May each of us as believers in Jesus Christ be ready and quick to humble ourselves before our loving Father and ask Him to forgive us and cleanse us of our sin, enabling us to live close to Him as our Father as we are led and governed by our Lord Jesus.

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Spurgeon in his sermon entitled "Self-Delusion", which is on our website, [www.TheWordofTruth.net](http://www.TheWordofTruth.net).

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### **A Test of Assurance**

Thomas Watson (1620-1686)

**HE WHO LOVES GOD DESIRES HIS PRESENCE.** Lovers cannot be long apart, they soon have their fainting fits, for want of a sight of the object of their love. A soul deeply in love with God desires the enjoyment of Him in His ordinances, in word, prayer, and sacraments. David was ready to faint away and die when he had not a sight of God. “My soul fainteth for God” (Psalm 84:2). Such as care not for ordinances, but say, “When will the Sabbath be over?” plainly reveal their lack of love to God.

He who loves God **DOES NOT LOVE SIN.** “Ye that love the Lord, hate evil” (Psalm 97:10). The love of God, and the love of sin, can no more mix together than iron and clay. Every sin loved, strikes at the being of God; but he who loves God, has a hatred of sin. He who would part two lovers is a hateful person. God and the believing soul are two lovers; sin parts between them, therefore the soul is implacably set against it. By this try your love to God. How could Delilah say she loved Samson, when she entertained correspondence with the Philistines, who were his mortal enemy?

He who loves God **IS NOT MUCH IN LOVE WITH ANYTHING ELSE.** His love is very cool to worldly things. His love to God moves swiftly, as the sun in the firmament; to the world it moves slowly, as the sun on the dial. The love of the world eats out the heart of religion; it chokes good affections, as earth puts out fire. The world was a dead thing to Paul. “I am crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to me” (Gal. 6:14). In Paul we may see both the picture and pattern of a mortified man. He that loves God, uses the world but chooses God. The world engages him, but God delights and satisfies him. He says as David, “God my exceeding joy,” the gladness or cream of my joy (Psalm 43:4).

He who loves God **CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT HIM.** Things we love we cannot be without. A man can do without music or flowers, but not food; so a soul deeply in love with God looks upon himself as undone without Him. “Hide not thy face from me, lest I be like them that go down into the pit” (Psalm 143:7). He says to Job, “I went mourning without the sun” (Job 30:28). I have starlight, I want the Sun of Righteousness; I enjoy not the sweet presence of my God. Is God our chief good, and we cannot live without Him? Alas! How do they show they have no love to God who can do well enough without Him! Let them have corn and oil, and you shall never hear them complain of the lack of God.

He who loves God **WILL BE AT ANY PAINS TO GET HIM.** What pains the merchant takes, what hazards he runs, to have a rich return from the Indies! Jacob loved Rachel, and he could endure the heat by day, and the frost by night, that he might enjoy her. A soul that loves God will take any pains for the fruition of Him. “My soul follows hard after God” (Psalm 63:8). Love *spondusanimae* (Augustine). It is the weight which sets the clock going. It is much in prayer, weeping, fasting; it strives as in agony that he may obtain Him whom his soul loves. Plutarch reports of the Gauls, an ancient people of France, that after they had tasted the sweet wine of Italy, they never rested till they had arrived at that country. He who is in love with God, never rests till he has a part in Him. “I sought him whom my soul loveth” (Song of Sol. 3:2). How can they say they love God, who are not industrious in the use of means to obtain Him? “A slothful man hides his hand in his bosom” (Prov. 19:24). He is not in agony, but lethargy. If Christ and salvation would drop as a ripe fig into his mouth, he would be content to have them; but he is loath to put himself to too much trouble. Does he love his friend, who win not undertake a journey to see him?

He who loves God **PREFERS HIM BEFORE ESTATE AND LIFE.** (1) Before estate—“For whom I have suffered the loss of all things” (Phil. 3:8). Who that loves a rich jewel would not part with a flower for it? Galeacius, Marcus of Vico, parted with a fair estate to enjoy God in His pure ordinances. When a Jesuit persuaded him to return to his popish religion in Italy, promising him a large sum of money, he said: “Let their money perish with them who esteem all the gold in the world worth one day’s communion with Jesus Christ

and his Holy Spirit.” (2) Before life—“They loved not their lives to the death” (Rev. 12:11). Love to God carries the soul above the love of life and the fear of death.

He who loves God LOVES HIS FAVOURITES, THE SAINTS (1 John 5:1). To love a man for his grace and the more we see of God in him, the more we love him, that is an infallible sign of love to God. The wicked pretend to love God, but hate and persecute His image. Does he love his prince who abuses his statue, or tears his picture? They seem indeed to show great reverence to saints departed; they have great reverence for Saint Paul, and Saint Stephen, and Saint Luke; they canonize dead saints, but persecute living saints; and do they love God? Can it be imagined that he loves God who hates His children because they are like God? If Christ were alive again, He would not escape a second persecution.

If we love God WE CANNOT BUT BE FEARFUL OF DISHONORING HIM, as the more a child loves his father the more he is afraid to displease him, and we weep and mourn when we have offended him. “Peter went out and wept bitterly” (Matt. 26:75). Peter might then think that Christ dearly loved him when He took him up to the mount where He was transfigured, and showed him the glory of heaven in a vision. That Peter should deny Christ after he had received such signal tokens of His love, this broke his heart with grief, “He wept bitterly.” Are our eyes dropping tears of grief for sin against God? It is a blessed evidence of our love to God; and such shall find mercy. “He shows mercy to thousands of them that love Him.”

Use. Let us be lovers of God. We love our food and shall we not love Him that gives it? All the joy we hope for in heaven is in God; and shall not He who shall be our joy then, be our love now? It is a saying of Augustine, *Annon pana satis magna est non amare te?* Is it not punishment enough Lord, not to love Thee? And again, *Animam meam in odia haberem.* I would hate my own soul if I did not find it loving God.

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