

The Gospel Message of Repentance

Matt 4:17

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17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Mark 6:7-12

7 And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits;

8 And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse:

9 But be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats.

10 And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place.

11 And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city.

12 And they went out, and preached that men should repent.

(Peter to the crowd that gathered when the lame man was healed)

Acts 3:19

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

(Paul defending his ministry to Agrippa)

Acts 26:19-20

19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

If you were to remove the word 'repent' from each of these passages and insert, 'believe and ask Jesus into your heart' in each one of these passages you would have today's so-called 'gospel.' If one believes statistics Evangelical Christianity has converted the population of the United States three times over in the last 50 years yet we continue on the downward moral slide toward Sodom.

Faith and repentance are the 'head' and the 'tail' of the same coin. Neither of them can survive in reality without the other. Suppose there was such a thing as a 1 million dollar bill and I had one. Now suppose that I cut it exactly in half and gave one half to you. What would you have? Would you have 500 thousand dollars? No! Would you have 1 thousand dollars? No! Truth is, you would have nothing at all without the other half. I submit to you that this doctrine of 'faith only' without the preaching of repentance to go with it is worth exactly as much as that half bill.

The problem is that the church has not been teaching people to repent of their sins nor have they

insisted upon it within their membership. We have sought to make salvation and church membership so easy and so accessible to people that I fear we have in many places (speaking in general) filled our churches with religious lost people who have no concept of repentance, obedience, or holiness. Thus the catastrophe in which our culture finds itself enmeshed.

I want to talk to you today on the topic of the gospel which Jesus and His apostles preached, not the so-called gospel that people have been fed in our country for the last 150 years.

‘Repentance’ technically means ‘to change one’s mind,’ but as it is used in scripture it means a profound change of mind, life, actions, attitudes, motives and direction from sin and wickedness unto faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ. One of the most profound cases is found in the person called “the Gadarene maniac” the demon possessed man who was delivered by the Lord Jesus Christ. One day he was running naked through the tombs screaming and cutting himself and a few hours later he was seated at the feet of Jesus listening to instructions, clothed and ‘in his right mind.’

Another case is that of Saul of Tarsus whom we find on one day headed to Damascus to arrest, torture and even kill believers in Jesus Christ. A few days later people are astonished to hear that he is preaching the gospel which he once destroyed.

These people had a change of mind for sure but it was the kind of mind shift that changes everything. Now most people who have been converted (truly converted) in the Christian era have not had the kind of experience of the man of Gadara or Saul of Tarsus, but they did, each and every one, have a mind swap that changed everything. Drunkards became sober, prostitutes became moral and upright ladies, thieves became honest men, liars began telling the whole truth all of the time, etc. etc.

But our world knows nothing about this and most preachers will not touch the topic at all for fear that someone will become offended and leave. But we cannot be concerned with that this morning. Every soul here must make certain that he/she has repented of their sins because otherwise they are going to perish eternally and without remedy. *Selah!*

Some years ago I became concerned about my own soul. Things were just not adding up. On the one hand I was convinced that I believed in Jesus Christ as my Savior but on the other hand there were things in my life that just did not agree with my faith. So, I began a project to make sure that I had repented completely and thoroughly. I said to myself, in fact I purposed within myself, “I am going to repent of all of my sins.” Along the way I learned a thing or two and I want to share some of that with you this morning.

I. To Repent... one must see the sin in himself.

Just like any resolution to any other problem, this must begin with seeing the problem... knowing that it exists.

- But in order to know that sin exists one must know something about God’s Law.

You see, the definition of sin is, “any violation of or lack of conformity to the Law of God.” That is probably the best definition in existence. But how does a person who knows nothing of

Divine Law see sin and repent of it? He cannot because if he knows nothing of the Law he does not understand sin and if he does not understand sin, he cannot repent.

That is the reason that the apostle Paul wrote, “the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.” (Gal 3:24).

And, if a person cannot repent, he cannot obey the message of the gospel proclaimed by Jesus and His apostles, he cannot be saved. He must, then, perish.

Do you remember the Word of God that came both at the baptism of Jesus and at His Transfiguration on the Mount? “This is my Beloved Son, hear ye Him.”

If a person cannot obey Jesus, he cannot love Him nor know Him because He said, “if you love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15)

Knowing God, Knowing Christ, begin with knowing and repenting of sin... but first you must see it, know that it exists, and that cannot be done apart from knowing something about Divine Law.

II. Once a person has seen his sin, he must, if he is going to repent, Own his sin.

David said concerning his hideous sins, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.” (Ps 51:4)

We live in an excuse-laden society where nothing is anybody’s fault. (That is, unless your name is George Bush, and then *everything* is your fault. :-))

But dealing with God about sin requires integrity of the First Order, such as David demonstrated. “Yes, I sinned, I did it, it is my fault and no one else’s. There is no excuse and no explanation that makes it OK or even makes it make sense.”

But before a person gets honest with God, he must become honest with himself. “I did this, all of this... which means that there is something terribly and hideously wrong with me.” He must come clean both to himself and to God but it must begin with ourselves. So long as I am making excuses, offering rationales, explaining, and justifying my behavior internally, I cannot honestly confess my actions to be sin before God.

You see, the great problem of dealing with God is that He already knows *Everything* and cannot be fooled with lame excuses.

We have a terrible problem as a Gospel Church. Most of the lost people in our world have learned the ‘lingo’ of the Modern Evangelical movement. It is almost as impossible to explain this concept to a lost religious person in our world as it is to explain it to people in a jungle who have never heard these ideas at all.

- Have you ever learned to do something but you learned it the wrong way? Maybe a skill in sports or a method of using a computer, or something else. Then, someone comes along and shows you the right way to do it and it is almost impossible? When we learn a

thing wrong and then must unlearn in order to learn it correctly it is more difficult than if we were starting from scratch.

The First Principle of the gospel message is that mankind, every single one of them is depraved. No, they are not all as bad as they could possibly be but they are every one infected, in every part of their being with wickedness, sin, rebellion against God. Or, as Paul said in Rom 3:10, "there is none righteous, no not one."

So, here we are with this awful problem and we are facing the reality that if we are going to do spiritual business with God we are required to do it with integrity.

- You are not only going to own what you have done but also you are going to own the reality of which you did it.
- There is a wickedness in you, an awful disease, for which you have no remedy.
- Not only that but you like this wickedness and on several levels you do not want to be healed of it.

Now, let me tell you this. Getting to this level of integrity and intensity with God about sin makes a person feel horrible, like he/she is the most terrible person who has ever lived. Paul cried out about himself, "O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

But you must also know and realize that until you get to real honesty and integrity with God about what you have done and why you did it, there is a real question as to whether you have ever repented of your sins.

Repentance, the real thing, is an agonizing experience and for that reason most religious people stay well clear of it. But I wonder what they are going to say to God when they see Him.

III. Once one has seen and owned his sin, he must cry out to God.

At the same time, he must understand, at least a little bit, about how He deals with sin and sinners.

You see, contrary to the impression that many preachers leave in our minds, God does not, will not, we might even say 'cannot,' simply 'forgive,' dismiss sin and let it go. He is perfectly holy and perfectly just. Every sin must be accounted for and fully paid by someone.

- If not you, then Someone is going to need to pay the price.
- And, what is the price? **Death** for even the smallest infraction of God's Law.

Your sins, in order for God to release you of them, **must** be transferred to the back of Someone Else Whose death God would accept as due and just penalty for all of that wickedness that you are asking Him to 'forgive.'

And this is not some 'mechanical process' in which you say a few 'magic words' and 'presto, zingo' the sin is gone. God is not a gumball machine where one puts his quarter in and out comes absolution for his sins.

Your crying out to God must come from a heart that is embarrassed and ashamed, broken and miserable, crushed and overwhelmed, concerning the realities of its sin.

Ps 51:1-3

- 1 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. KJV

If there is any falseness, sham, pretense in your petition to Him for forgiveness the deal is off. God has promised nothing but judgment for the hypocrite, and if you behave toward Him without integrity, you are one.

There is a process which, in the Bible, is called ‘confession,’ which literally means ‘to say with’ or ‘to agree’ and it points toward the total agreement between the sinner and the Great God that his sins are exactly what God says they are, that God’s condemnation of them is holy, just, and true... And... that the Only Possible Remedy for them is the Death of His Own Son.

The sinner must come to a place of agreement with God about sin in general and his sins in particular. Otherwise ‘confession’ cannot occur in any real sense.

Consider the alternative, a person admitting sin on the one hand while holding the opinion that it is not as bad as God thinks or has declared it to be in His Word. How is that supposed to work? When He knows the inmost thoughts of every soul?

No, my friend, you must come to see sin as horrible, every offense as a miserable act of rebellion and ingratitude, and your must cry out to Him for mercy in the same way and with the same intensity that Paul had when he realized that he had been waging war on God Himself.

So, confess it, confess it all, describe to God in your own words how detestable you believe your sin to be. Take His side against yourself and seek to see how difficult it is to forgive such a one as you are.

Let the awfulness of your rebellion sweep over you until you can do nothing but say like that old publican that Jesus mentioned, “Lord, be merciful to me, *the sinner*,” with your head bowed, not daring even to look toward His throne in heaven.

Modern religionists are disgusting in their flippant and arrogant disregard for the Holiness of God as they deal with sin. They will learn... on that Day when it is too late... that God is not to be trifled with.

One help to the process of owning and confessing sin is to take an honest look around at your own life and ask:

- where has sin brought me?
- What has it done to me?

What has it done to the people I love?

IV. The part so often forgotten is that once these things have been done, the sin must be forsaken.

God must be at work in every step of the process of repentance. He must work in us to help us see our sin, to 'own' our sin with integrity, and to cry out to Him for forgiveness, agreeing with Him concerning the severity and awfulness of it.

But the next step in the process needs a massive movement of His grace, His enabling power, within us, granting ability that we do not and cannot naturally have.

Repentance is not repentance until sin is forsaken.

Ezek 18:23

23 Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that ***he should return from his ways***, and live? KJV

Isa 55:7

7 ***Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts***: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. KJV

This forsaking must be permanent. That is not to say that one must become perfect of that serious believers may not have hideous failures. David committed adultery and murder, Solomon compromised with false religions, Uzziah committed sacrilege, Peter denied Jesus, and John Mark abandoned Paul on the mission field. All of these things happened but because those people knew and understood repentance, because they had turned from sin, they would not stay in rebellion. They repented anew and returned to the Lord and were restored.

There is another kind of forsaking sin, however, that is not permanent. The soul returns to the sin and stays there. Such repentance is not a part of the dynamic of true salvation.

2 Peter 2:20-22

20 For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.

21 For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

22 But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. KJV

Permanent repentance means that one is done with sin, that he will not return to the mire and stay there. This temporary repentance happens when sin is forsaken, 'but not really.' It may be done

to satisfy someone else or to fulfill a requirement or to gain some status with someone. It may even begin seemingly in sincerity but somewhere, somehow, the process gets short-circuited and the one who seemingly had left sin behind returns to it and is never recovered. Such 'repentance' is counterfeit and does not save.

The True Repentance that is a part of true conversion is a forsaking of the particular sins of the individual but it is also a forsaking of sin as a principle. One moves from being a willing victim and captive of sin to becoming a warrior who fights against all of sin's manifestations.

V. But even all of this is not the complete story. There must also be a healing of the soul, a cleansing of the conscience, that only God can provide.

It is absolutely necessary to the recovery of the soul.

The NT has quite a few mentions of the conscience but it never goes into detail describing it. But it does emphasize the importance of a good, pure, and undefiled conscience.

As I understand it, the conscience is God's mechanism, created in each of us, by which a record is made and kept concerning our sins. A weight of guilt is assigned to each conscious act of rebellion and remains there until God Himself takes it away. (Obviously there are people in whom the process is badly broken by the complete giving over of one's self to ungodliness.)

Quite often, I have discovered, people are granted genuine repentance by God but somehow they come out on the other side of conversion without a real sense of freedom. Instead, they go forward with a nagging sense that they are still somehow guilty and not forgiven.

Even though the scriptures speak of liberty and freedom these folks do not seem to experience it.

John 8:32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

John 8:36 If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

2 Cor 3:17 ...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

It is often necessary, therefore, for the converted and repentant soul to seek after the cleansing and healing of his conscience, the release from the burden of the remaining sense of guilt. It is entirely possible and frequently a reality that one continues to have a *sense of guilt* long after the guilt has actually been removed.

This is also a vital part of redemption, salvation, conversion, and God intends for His people to actually be able to experience the blessing of the forgiveness of sins so as to be able to rejoice in it.

VI. My Questions for You:

Have you ever truly repented before God for your sins?

Have you forsaken your sins and taken up a warrior stance against *all sin*?

If this message has exposed any weaknesses in your views of repentance, will you seek to remedy the problem or will you hang onto a flawed and dangerous position?

Do you realize that if you get this wrong you are eternally lost?