

Repentance

The Necessity of Repentance

Repentance is necessary and is required for all people who would like to be reconciled to God. First, we need to point out that God has already made the way through the cross, for men to be reconciled to Him. Without the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, no amount of repentance is enough that could make sins be forgiven. Even the sins of men from the Old Testament were pardoned on the basis of the then future sacrificial offering of the Lamb of God, as foreshadowed by the sacrifice of animals done in the tabernacle and temple.

Second Corinthians 5:19, To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

But God making a way for sins to be forgiven, does not necessarily mean that all sins then are already forgiven; man needs to do his part too. God has already removed the obstacle for reconciliation, but now man has to meet this halfway, by repentance. This is also a gift from God, that he must act upon. Even the desire to do in accordance to God's will is something that God works out within man.

Philippians 2:13, For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure.

Second Corinthians 7:10, For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

The godly sorrow coming from God would work out to repentance, and therefore man must act on it, by actually doing it, hence the word repent is in the imperative, meaning to say, a command.

So repentance is God's requirement for every man, and its necessity was clearly pointed in the Scriptures.

Matthew 3:1 to 2, In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

The ministry of John the Baptist was a ministry of calling the people to repentance.

Even the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, was heralded by his calling of the people to it.

Matthew 4:17, From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Luke 13:3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Here, the Lord Jesus Christ pointed out the need of all men to repent, one must not compare his sinfulness to that of others, and take pride into thinking that others are more sinful than he is. The Lord said, No, we must not think that others are more worthy of judgment than we are, because if we will not repent, we shall likewise all perish.

Also, the apostolic ministry was inaugurated by the preaching of repentance to the people who were present in the day of Pentecost,

Acts 2:37 to 38, Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Also, Apostle Paul boldly declared to the people of Athens,

Acts 17:30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

So repentance is indeed necessary, that the New Testament preachers heavily pointed to it.

Before we go and define what repentance is, we will discuss first what **it is not**.

What Repentance is Not

1. Remorse or regret is not repentance

Remorse is feeling sorry because of the result or consequence of the deed done. Sometimes we feel sorry when we perceive or actually receive the consequence of our sin. A thief may feel sorry because he was caught, and therefore is to be imprisoned, but not because he broke the law of God. While it is possible for remorse to lead to true repentance, which is a change of mind, or a turning away from sin, it is also possible that a person stays in remorse or regret, rather than have real repentance that will lead to salvation.

For example, in the Old Testament, we can find Esau, who regretted the result of having his inheritance and birthright taken from him, but not sorrowful for despising his birthright in the first place. We can read his remorse or regret in the book of Hebrews;

Hebrews 12:16 to 17, Lest there *be* any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

Repentance here refers to a change in effect, meaning though he cried upon his father, his father was not able to change the outcome; his blessing forever taken from him. But here we see remorse or regret, because of the consequence, and not because of a realization of despising God's blessing in his life.

Another example of remorse is that of Judas,

Matthew 27:3 to 5, Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,

Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What *is that* to us? see thou *to that*. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

In Judas case, he changed his mind and acknowledged his sin, in betraying innocent blood, but all these were brought about by seeing the consequence of what he had done. While it was possible for Judas to genuinely repent, that is to be reconciled to God, he stayed in that grief, and was overwhelmed by the emotion, and was not able to shift to the desire to be reconciled with God. Instead, he became imprisoned in his emotion and regret, he took his own life.

We need to note that remorse or regret can possibly lead to genuine repentance, but we must be careful not to be overwhelmed by it, or we could become prisoners of our regrets. The focus should shift from ourselves, and the consequence, and the guilt; towards the Saviour, who would lead us to reconciliation and forgiveness.

2. Doing Penance/penitentiary works is not Repentance

Doing penance or penitentiary works is a part of the Roman Catholic Sacrament of Reconciliation. This is based on their doctrine of absolution, whereas they claim that the authority to forgive sins, that were given to the apostles by the Lord Jesus Christ were transferred and inherited by the priests through apostolic authority succession. A careful study of the passage John 20:23 and parallel passages in the gospel, where Jesus supposedly gave the apostles the authority to forgive and retain sins, would show us that this is because they were given the mandate to preach the gospel through which forgiveness of sins was made possible. It is unthinkable that the passage literally meant that the apostles were given authority to forgive sins, which would be blasphemy, as the forgiving of sins is God's prerogative alone. What the verse means is that the Lord, because He commissioned the apostles to preach the gospel to the whole world, through which salvation can be obtained, by effect has given to them the means and parameters as to how sins can be forgiven. It is not an actual or literal authority to forgive or absolve the sins of men. Also the claim that this authority was transferred to the priests by apostolic succession is something that is questionable.

Because of this, St. Jerome, when he translated the New Testament from Greek to Latin, as commissioned by the Roman Catholic Church, translated the Greek *metanoite* which means to repent, to *poenitentiam agite*, which means *do penance*. That is why most Catholic Versions of the Bible, patterned after the Vulgate, would read, "Do penance", instead of "repent".

Doing penitentiary works would lead someone into believing that sins were absolved because of that work done; that repentance is simply paying for the sins you committed by pious works or reciting prayers, or to some even by hurting their own bodies. While showing an external sign of repentance is also required, and is referred to as "fruit of repentance", we must not mistake the fruit to be the same as to the root. True repentance, which is a change in one's mind, must be there before even trying to make an external sign, or it will not be genuine, but rather it will just be a vain attempt to pacify the conscience. True repentance means a turning away from sins. Many people that believe penitentiary works lead to forgiveness of sins mistakenly think that it is therefore equivalent to repentance, to the

effect that there is no true change in the heart, because they may think that sins can anyway be absolved or “paid” by doing penitentiary works. Therefore there is no sorrow and turning away from sins.

3. Moral Licensing is not Repentance

Another form of unreal repentance is what psychologists call “Moral Licensing”. Let’s take for example a husband and wife. The husband did something bad to the wife, let’s say he was being unfaithful to her. When the wife confronted the husband, instead of the being sorry and deciding to himself that he will no longer be unfaithful, that he will change, the husband just gave gifts to the wife, and treated her to a wonderful dinner, without any intention of changing whatsoever. The wife accepted the gifts, and the husband assumed he was forgiven, then continued in his unfaithfulness.

When we sin, sometimes we have this urge to do something, maybe an act or deed that would make us feel pious, godly or religious, in attempt to pacify our guilt. But since there is no genuine repentance, this act would lead us back to sin, as we feel justified, or licensed to indulge since we have done something good prior. We sometimes attempt to pay our sins with works. Some people would even give to charity works to appease their conscience. Sometimes we think that giving offering, or going to church, or even worshipping is a way to pay for the sins we may have committed. People have this thinking that God subtracts our sins from our good works, that in the end of our good works exceeds our sins, we will somehow be saved. That is not true, as our good works are not good enough to negate our sins. Only the blood of Christ has the power to cleanse our sins.

When we sin, what God wants is for us to repent, to be sorrowful about the sin and to turn away from it. He does not delight in offerings or any works that we may be doing in attempt to pay for our sins. Only the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross has the efficacy to pay for our sins, and not our own works of righteousness. No matter what gift or work or sacrifice we may offer, it cannot pay for a single sin that we have committed. It is actually an insult to the Lord and the calvary for us to offer our own works to pay for our sins, because He already paid for it all. What God wants when we sin is not gifts, or our own works of righteousness to cover it, but rather a heart that truly repents, a decision turn away from sins and to change.

See for example what Saul did in his disobedience;

Saul was given order by God through the prophet Samuel to kill all the Amalekites, even their animals,

First Samuel 15:2 to 3, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember *that* which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid *wait* for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

This is because of the sin of Amalek of battling the children of Israel while they are still a small wandering people in the wilderness. We can find the account in Exodus 17, where Israel won the battle,

and the Lord having sworn to have war with Amalek from generation to generation. Also, we can find how these Amalekites fought by attacking the hindmost part of the people where the weak are;

Deuteronomy 25:17 to 18, Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; How he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, *even all that were feeble behind thee*, when thou *wast* faint and weary; and he feared not God.

So the Lord gave Saul the task to destroy this people, and Saul did not obey God's command entirely. He left alive Agag the king, and the animals.

First Samuel 15:9, But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all *that was good*, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing *that was vile and refuse*, that they destroyed utterly.

So Saul disobeyed God – instead of killing all even the animals, Saul and the people spared the king and the good fat animals. When confronted by Prophet Samuel, see Saul's reasoning;

First Samuel 15:20 to 21, And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, **to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God** in Gilgal.

Saul thought that to disobey God is fine, as he had all these animal sacrifices to pay for his disobedience. He thought of using the animals as sacrifice unto the Lord, as if a form of a bribe, thinking God is willing to turn a blind eye to his disobedience because of the animal sacrifices. Instead of him acknowledging his sin and repenting, that is changing his ways, and turning away from his disobedience, Saul hoped to be right with God through the animal sacrifices. See how the prophet replied to him,

First Samuel 15:22, And Samuel said, Hath the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *and* to hearken than the fat of rams.

The Prophet was saying here, God wants Saul to obey, and that God requires obedience over sacrifices. Not that God does not accept our sacrifices, but rather, God does not delight in sacrifices done in disobedience. Here we can see that God does not want our sacrifices and offering, and our works that may seem godly or pious, when we sin.

Proverbs 15:8 The sacrifice of the wicked *is* an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright *is* his delight.

When we sin, what God wants is repentance, and not a gift, or a bribe, or any form of sacrifice. What must come first before doing any such things, is a genuine repentance. A change of heart, a turning away from sin. After we repent of our sins, then we can bring sacrifices and services unto God which are pleasing to His sight.

Aren't we sometimes guilty of the same? When we think that, "Lord I sinned, but don't worry, I will just make it up to you, by going to church on Sunday." Or sometimes, "I will just pray longer", or "I will worship longer", "I will praise louder", "I will jump higher", or "I will give more offering". While there are nothing wrong with these on themselves, it becomes wrong when we substitute them to true repentance, which is a change in heart and mind, and turning away from the sin.

See what David said in his repentance song,

Psalms 51:16-17 For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give *it*: thou delightest not in burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

David acknowledged that in his sinfulness, what God desires from him is not sacrifices, nor gifts nor anything that he could offer as payment for what he has done against Him. Without repentance, God does not delight in burnt offering, no matter how many, or else David would have given it. David could afford to offer hundreds and thousands of animal sacrifices since he is a king – but David knew that is not the point or repentance. What God wants when we sin, is a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart. Broken and contrite means a crushed heart, a heart that feels sorrow because of the offense done and to whom it was done to.

Remember the Lord's parable about the Pharisee and the publican? While the Pharisee was commending himself to God for the things he has done in service to Him, the publican *would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.* (Luke 18:13) The Lord justified the sinner because he is truly repenting, acknowledging himself a sinner.

What True Repentance is

Repentance is translated from the Greek *metanoia*, which is a compound of the words *meta*, which means *beyond*, and the word *nuos*, or the mind. That means *metanoia* is *going beyond the mind*, or going beyond our current state of mind, or a change of mind. When we repent, we go beyond the current state of our mind, that is in sin. We turn away from sin and we turn to God. This begins with a true sorrow because of what was done, and not only because of the consequence. The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians,

Second Corinthians 7:9 to 10, Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

True repentance therefore comes from a godly sorrow, sorrow that is not of the world that worketh death, just like that of Judas. When we realize that we have committed sin, that is offending or

transgressing the holy commandments of God, and thereby offending God Himself, then we have this godly sorrow towards the sin, thus we decide to turn away from it.

Again, quoting from David's penitential song,

Psalms 51:1 to 4, Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin *is* ever before me.

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear when thou judgest.

We can sense here David's acknowledging of his own sin, not blaming it to others, but claiming full responsibility for it, declaring it *my transgressions, mine iniquity, my sin*.

We can also see here that David seeks after the mercy of God, and he is not seeking to justify his own actions. Repentance is acknowledging that God's judgment could be rightfully bestowed upon us, therefore we seek after the *tender mercies* of God, not demanding, but pleading.

Psalms 51:10 to 13 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me *with thy* free spirit.

Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

True repentance is a change of heart, so David here asks the Lord to create him a clean heart. We can also say that repentance should have the need to be reconciled to God, and should not harbor into isolation and alienation from Him. We can also see that after restoration is the desire to do something for God, that is to *teach transgressors thy ways*. This should come after restoration or reconciliation, and not before.

Sin is the thing that separates man from God,

Isaiah 59:1 to 2, Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear.

And God through the cross of calvary has made the way for the reconciliation, that is there is no longer hindrance in the part of God for the reconciliation. Therefore, anyone who truly wants to be reconciled needs to turn away from the very sin that separated him in the first place, believing in the gospel, that

his sin was already taken by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross and paid for its just dues. Repentance is the first step of applying to one's life his faith to the redemptive work of Christ. That is, by turning away from our sins, we express our faith that we have been dead to sin, crucified together with Christ. That when one admits he is a sinner, and confessed unto God his sin, with a heart that is contrite and willing to be reconciled with God, He promised to forgive us.

First John 1:8 to 9, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

All quoted Scriptures are from the King James Version.