

Biblical Repentance

1. The Need of Repentance

Why is *Biblical repentance* the need of this hour? Because we are living in a day when most religious leaders actually deny the *need* for repentance. If they preach it at all, they water it down like the seminary president who said repentance means no more than “a gentleman telling God he is sorry.” Others say that repentance was only for the Jews and not for us today. Some say that repentance is *only* for the children of God and has *nothing* to do with lost sinners, while others teach just the opposite: they say repentance is *only* for lost sinners but *not* for the children of God! And still others claim that repentance is just a form of works and unnecessary for *any* group! So, my purpose is to refute these fatal errors that are beguiling precious souls to eternal destruction.

Now let us hear the testimony of the Word of God. In Luke 13:3 and 5 we hear our Lord’s words: “Except ye *repent*, ye shall all likewise perish.” What He is saying is this: “Unless you lay down your arms of rebellion against God, you shall perish in Hell, for you abide under the wrath of God. Confess your sins and leave them or you shall perish forever!”

So to begin with, I must set forth the effect of sin upon the human race, especially upon you and me. What *is* sin?

Sin: Its definition

Sin in its essence is rebellion against God.¹ This means thinking we have the right to do with ourselves as we please and acting independently of God and His Holy law. As the Apostle John says, “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law” (1Jo 3:4). In fact sin is our way of saying to God, “Stay out of my life; I don’t need you.”

Sin: Its Solemn Consequences

The doctrine of sin’s effect upon you and me and the whole human race is *most solemn*. As no heart can sufficiently conceive, so no tongue can adequately express the state of wretchedness and ruin which sin has brought upon guilty, miserable man. You ask, “What has it done?” Oh my friend, it has separated us from God! It has warped and ruined our bodies, souls, and spirits! Sin has filled our bodies with sickness and disease. Sin has defaced the image of God in our souls. Sin has cut off our fellowship with Him Who made us in His own moral likeness! Sin has made you and me by nature lovers of evil and haters of God, Who is the *only* good. Yes, it is a most solemn thing to view sin in the light of God’s Word, to see what it has done to man, to God and His Christ, and to God’s creation! Sin has shut us out from God and opened the gates of Hell. It is solemn, because sin has cost man his most precious possession—his *never-dying soul*.

¹ The word *sin* means “falling short of the mark.” 1Jo 5:17 declares that “*all* unrighteousness is sin”; this means *anything* that is not in harmony with the righteous character of God. 1Jo 3:4 tells us that sin is the breaking of God’s law, which is the violation of God’s revealed will. These Biblical definitions make clear that sin is every thought, word, attitude, and deed that are in opposition to the revelation of God’s character and will displayed in His Word.

Sin: Humbling to Man

Again, the doctrine of sin as revealed in God's Word is *a very humbling one*. Why? Because the Bible does not present us as merely ignorant and in need of instruction. Neither does it present us as run down and in need of a tonic. Rather, it reveals that you and I have become spiritually dead and void of *any* righteousness that will commend us to God.

This means we are spiritually without strength, thoroughly incapable of bettering ourselves, exposed to the wrath of God, and unable to perform a single work which can find acceptance with a holy God (Rom 3:10-18).

The impossibility of anyone gaining God's approval by his own works appears plainly in the case of the rich young ruler who came to Christ (Mat 19). When you judge this young man by human standards, he was a model of virtue and religious attainment. Yet, like so many others who trust in self-efforts and self-righteousness, he was ignorant of the spirituality and strictness of God's law. When Christ showed him the covetousness of his heart, he went away sorrowful, for he had great riches. It was *humbling* to find out that his best duties in religion were nothing but stinking rags in the nostrils of God (Isa 64:6). This young man would not confess that his morality and his best deeds were only damning works of darkness that he needed to mourn over and forsake.

Sin: Our Nature

How humbling it is to discover that God requires *truth in the inward parts* (Psa 51:6)! How humbling it is that we cannot shut off sin in our hearts and our minds! How humbling it is that we, like all others, must take our place before God as sinners and plead *guilty* before Him. We do not want to confess that we are *sinners*—lost, undone, helpless, and guilty—before God. The moral and self-righteous do not want to confess that they are in the same fix before God as the rapist, the harlot, and the drunkard! Nevertheless, we are sinners by nature and by practice.

We cannot get rid of sin by resolution, command, sacrifice, or by shutting ourselves out from the world, because it *is* our *nature*. Jeremiah 13:23 reads, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil."

This fact humbled the apostle Paul. It led him to repent and confess himself a hell-deserving sinner before God. In Romans 7 he tells us that he was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came that he should not covet, then all Hell broke loose in his soul. He saw that he was carnal,² sold under sin. He confessed that it was humbling to find out that what he *wanted* to do—live righteously—he *could not do*. And what he did *not* want to do—sin against a holy and righteous God—he *found himself doing*. He confessed that he had the *will* to do good, but *no power* to perform it. His will was depraved and held captive by his sinful nature: "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:19). Fight it, resolve against it, denounce it, do everything against it that he would—he could not get rid of it.

Likewise, when we by the illuminating power of God's Spirit see the awful *power* of sin in *our* lives, it is humbling.

Sin: How God Sees Our Hearts

The Bible declares that the effect of sin upon man is such that *our hearts are compared to some of the most revolting things* that we can think of! It uses these descriptions to show us how our sins look to God.

² carnal – given to sensual pleasures.

Did you know that God's Word describes us by nature as *maggots*? It does in Job 25:4-6: "How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight. How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?"³ The root meaning for *worm* here in the Hebrew is "worm of decay."⁴ This is the way God sees us in the decay of our sin outside of Christ.

Again, did you know that God describes us in our depraved nature as a *putrefying sore*? He does, in Isaiah 1:4-6:

"Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment."

The Scriptures also show that sin has made man like the beasts in ignorance and stupidity; therefore, we must repent. We read this in Psalm 73:22: "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a *beast* before thee." Also in Psalm 49:20 we read, "Man that is in honour, and understandeth not [spiritually], is like the *beasts* that perish." If you are still playing with sin, you will doom your soul to hell. And you are like the beasts that perish, for you are *void of understanding*.

I hear someone saying, "This is not very palatable language!" I know, but this is God's Word. We must be stripped of all our pride and self-righteousness and for ever despair of finding anything *in* us to commend us to God.

What a picture of depraved man! What a picture of you and me by nature! Seeing us in this putrefying state, God *must* command repentance.

Let me reason with you: If you make no provision for eternity and have no mind for the world to come, then surely God's Word pictures you accurately in all of these descriptions. You are like a maggot, a putrefying sore, and a beast that perishes. O that you knew your latter end (Deu 32:29) and would flee to God in repentance, casting yourself upon His mercy in Christ! O that you would stand before the Holy God today, humbling yourself before Him, and crying after Him in true repentance!

2. The Meaning of Repentance

Repentance Defined

You see then, sinful man stands as a rebel against God's government and authority. This is why our Lord Jesus came on the scene preaching, "*Repent*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat 4:17). He commands *every* sinner to lay down his arms of rebellion and hoist the white flag of surrender to enter the Kingdom of God. In other words, a sinner has to *change his mind about sin*.

³ Matthew Henry comments on this verse, "So sordid and filthy. Man is not pure for he is a worm, hatched in putrefaction, and therefore odious to God." Matthew Henry, *E4's Matthew Henry's Complete 6 Volume Commentary*, (electronic ed.).

⁴ Harris, R. L., Archer, G. L., & Waltke, B. K. (1999, c1980). *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, (p. 850). Chicago: Moody Press.

And this is exactly what it means to repent: *a change of mind about sin and about God*, which results in turning *from sin to God*.⁵ And what a turning it is! Repentance affects the *whole life* of a sinner.

Repentance includes a sinner *taking the blame for his sinful condition* before God and siding with Him against himself. A penitent blames no one else for his condition, but rather condemns himself under God's eternal wrath because he deserves it.

Repentance includes *sorrowing for sin*. 2 Corinthians 7:10 says that "godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of." And Matthew 5:4 says, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."

Repentance leads to *confessing sin*. Hiding nothing, a sinner owns his sins and pours out his sinful heart to God.

Furthermore, repentance leads to *forsaking sin*. A repenting sinner determines not to return to it. So in Biblical repentance, a convicted and convinced sinner takes his place before God as justly condemned. He hates his sin, longing to be free from it. He sorrows over sin, determining not to return to it. And he shows that his repentance is real by walking in the pathway of righteousness and true holiness. "Bringing forth fruits for repentance" is evidence that a radical change has taken place in our lives (Mat 3:8).

⁵ The Biblical vocabulary for repentance is truly rich. The theme of repentance is found throughout the entire Bible and its idea is expressed even when the word itself is not used. In the OT, two Hebrew words, the verbs *nacham* and *shub*, are often translated as *repent*. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Koehler, Baumgartner, Richardson, and Stamm says *nacham* means "to be sorry, come to regret something, to repent" as in Job 42:6, "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." In their *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Keil and Delitzsch remark, "*Nacham* is the exact expression for *metanoeo*, the godly sorrow of repentance not to be repented of. He repents (sitting) on dust and ashes after the manner of those in deep grief." Regarding *shub*, which means "to turn," *The Theological Wordbook of the OT* says, "The Bible is rich in idioms describing man's responsibility in the process of repentance. Such phrases would include the following: 'incline your heart unto the Lord your God' (Josh 24:23); 'circumcise yourselves to the Lord' (Jer 4:4); 'wash your heart from wickedness' (Jer 4:14); 'break up your fallow ground' (Hos 10:12) and so forth. All these expressions of man's penitential activity, however, are subsumed and summarized by this one verb *shub*. For better than any other verb it combines in itself the two requisites of repentance: to turn from evil and to turn to the good." They conclude by saying, "To be sure, there is no systematic spelling out of the doctrine of repentance in the OT. It is illustrated (Ps 51) more than anything else. Yet the fact that people are called "to turn" either "to" or "away from" implies that sin is not an ineradicable stain, but by turning, a God-given power, a sinner can redirect his destiny. There are two sides in understanding conversion, the free sovereign act of God's mercy and man's going beyond contrition and sorrow to a conscious decision of turning to God. The latter includes repudiation of all sin and affirmation of God's total will for one's life."

In the NT, three Greek words express repentance: the verbs *metanoeo*, *metamelomai*, and the noun *metanoia*. 1) According to the *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* by Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, *metanoeo* is used "predominately of a religious and ethical change in the way one thinks about acts: repent, change one's mind, be converted (Mat 3:2)." It can also express an emotional element: "as feeling remorse regret, feel sorry (Luk 17:3, 4)." 2) *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* by Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, and Bauer says that *metamelomai* means to "feel regret, repent." The *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* by J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida says of *metamelomai* "to change one's mind about something, with the probable implication of regret—"to change one's mind, to think differently." 3) "*Metanoia* means "a change of mind that leads to a change of behavior." Louw and Nida say of *metanoeo* and *metanoia*, "To change one's way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness—"to repent, to change one's way, repentance." *metanoeo*: 'And they went out, and preached that men should repent' (Mar 6:12). *metanoia*: 'not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?' (Rom 2:4). Though in English a focal component of repent is the sorrow or contrition that a person experiences because of sin, the emphasis in *metanoeo* and *metanoia* seems to be more specifically the total change, both in thought and behavior, with respect to how one should both think and act." The importance of these definitions is that while the *primary* emphasis in repentance is on the change of mind that leads to a change of behavior, one cannot rule out the emotional element of regret or remorse.

Repentance and Judgment

In Acts 17:30 we read these words, “The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.” God says *all* men—not just the Gentiles, but *all* men, which includes every tongue, nation, tribe and people. And in v.31 we find out why God has commanded all men everywhere to repent: judgment is coming! “*Repent!*” God says, “The King is coming in judgment! *Repent*, if you value your never-dying soul!” Why? “Because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained [Jesus Christ]; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” Yes, God commands that all men everywhere repent and bring forth fruit suitable for repentance which is a holy life, or He will meet you in judgment *without mercy!*

You see, God is *sovereign* in his salvation. He alone sets the terms by which He receives rebellious sinners into His kingdom. His Word does declare that He is loving, kind, merciful and gracious; but He is also holy and righteous. Therefore, He commands men to repent. Unless a rebellious sinner repents and believes the Gospel, there is no forgiveness. But praise His precious name; it is to this kind of sinner that He will look! The Lord says in Isaiah 66:2, “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” Also, Psalm 51:17 tells us, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”

Praise the Lord! He will never turn away a repentant, believing sinner. Christ came to seek and to save just this type of sinner. Listen to Isaiah 55:6-7: “Seek ye the LORD while He may be found, call ye upon Him while he is near: 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.” You will note in these verses there is again a command for forsaking our way and turning unto God. Forsake your way and turn to God!⁶

Repentance Is Perpetual

I must stress yet another truth: *Biblical repentance is perpetual*—God’s child will repent till God takes him home. Repentance is a lasting mindset, a continuing abhorrence of evil.

Oh how many precious souls have been damned right here! They seem to embrace repentance for a while. They give up their old companions and leave their places of sin—the bar, the dance floor, the harlot’s house. They seem to embrace Christ. They even preach, teach, and witness for Him. But because they are “stony-ground hearers” (Mar 4:5, 6; 16, 17), they only endure for a while. They begin to grow cold, gradually returning to their former ways. They go back to sin, back to what they had renounced. One by one they pick up the old sins and companions and return to the world. You see, their repentance was not perpetual: it did not spring from the new birth, but from the flesh. The Word of God describes them:

“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. 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. 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” (2Pe 2:20-22).

⁶ This does not mean that one must stop every act of sin *before* he can come to Christ. This is impossible. It means he changes his mind, turns from it in his heart, and then turns from known sin in his life more and more as he matures in Christ.

In so many cases, going back is *slow*. Few go back all at once! First, they long for “liberty”: they search the Word of God to find out what liberty they have, so they can live as close to the world as possible. Then slowly they go back to this sin and that sin. Finally, they no longer have a witness for Christ, but *only an outward profession of faith*. Sin doesn’t bother them anymore. They neither hate it nor cry against it. They tell themselves that God no longer wants them to repent and hate sin. They think they’re in the way of life, yet sin doesn’t bother them anymore! So they turn back to those sins from which they had once turned saying, “We now have *liberty* to walk in these ways!” But oh, my friends, this is not liberty, but *license* to do what you’ve always wanted to do, *license* to walk in sin without restraint! You’ve played with fire and your heart is now hardened by the deceitfulness of sin! (Heb 3:12)

Again I warn you, *beware* of repentance that does not *continue*! If it is not true Biblical repentance, your heart will again be satisfied with the garbage of the world: “He feedeth on ashes; a *deceived heart* hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?” (Isa 44:20). So never forget: true repentance is *perpetual*. If you are truly converted, you will hate and forsake your sins for the rest of your life.⁷ And you will long to be holy, to be like Christ, and to please God.

I ask, “Have *you* ever possessed the true Biblical repentance that God commands of all men?”

Repentance Is a Gift

Now I must quickly add that *repentance is a gift of grace* worked in the heart by the power of God the Holy Spirit.⁸ Acts 11:18 tells us: “Then hath God also to the Gentiles *granted repentance* unto life.” The Holy Spirit shows us our sinful condition before God and makes us willing to renounce our hatred of God and His authority. And by His grace He gives us a desire to walk with Him in newness of life and holiness.

As we have already seen, God commands us to repent because you and I are *rebels against God* by nature. *Every* man outside of Christ is a rebel against the Throne of God (Rom. 8:7). Because of our sinful nature we have determined to live our lives apart from God. So we must radically change our minds about living independently of Him. This displays itself in our crying after God to be *Lord* and *Ruler* of our lives!

Because we have spit in His face, blasphemed His name, bowed down to the gods of gold and pleasure, spent His Day as we pleased, and walked in pride and arrogance against Him, God commands us to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. We must change our minds about pride and arrogance, about covetousness and worldly pleasure, and about walking in *our* way. We must cry out to Him to work His love and holiness in us.

Yes, my friends, because we have not loved Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and have lavished our love on self and the world, God commands us to repent, trusting the Lord Jesus for the remission of our sins. For you see, true repentance takes *self* off the throne and enthrones *Christ* as Lord over every area of life.

⁷ While Biblical repentance *is* perpetual, this does not mean the God’s children do not experience a continuing struggle with sin or “dry” periods. Paul writes, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal 5:17). But the true children of God can never be satisfied and content with their sins. The Holy Spirit will convict true believers of grieving Him, He will illumine their hearts, and He will grant them repentance and restored fellowship with the Lord (Psa 51).

⁸ Repentance as a “gift of grace” springs from the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus called being “born again” (Joh 3:3; 1Pe 1:23). This new birth is also referred to as being “born of the Spirit” (Joh 3:5, 6, 8), “born of God” (Joh 1:13; 1Jo 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18), begotten of God (1Pe 1:3; 1Jo 5:1, 18), and regeneration (Tit 3:5). The Bible uses several other terms as well. No sinner will truly repent unless he is first made alive by the Holy Spirit.

3. The Connection of Repentance and Faith

Repentance and faith are inseparably connected in the Word of God, and they must be preached together. Let us not put asunder what God has joined together (Mat 21:32; Mar 1:15; Act 2:38; 5:31; 20:21; 2Ti 2:25).

The Word of God plainly teaches that God *commands* “all men every where to repent” (Act 17:30). Furthermore, the Bible plainly teaches that *repentance* is as necessary as *faith* in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul told his hearers in Acts 20:20-21, “I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Therefore, repentance *and* faith are commanded by God in the call of the gospel.⁹

Listen to these verses of Scripture where these great truths are set forth together in the Word of God! In Mark 1:15, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” “For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him” (Mat 21:32). Paul gives this testimony of his ministry: “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Act 20:21). The epistle to the Hebrews says, “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God” (Heb 6:1). Then, one of our Lord’s last commandments to His disciples before He returned to heaven is found in Luke 24:46-48: “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved¹⁰ Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem; and ye are witnesses of these things.”

The Bible gives us illustrations of those who came to Christ in repentance and faith; these looked to Him to forgive them of their sins. The thief on the cross repented and believed; the prodigal son repented and believed; and so we call upon men today to repent and believe.

⁹ Repentance and faith are “two sides of the same coin” referred to as *conversion*. Repentance is the *negative* side and faith is the *positive*. Repentance turns *from* sin, faith turns *to* God. As the Apostle Paul said, “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Act 20:21). Repentance and faith are so closely joined that there are some passages that speak of *repentance* without mentioning faith: “And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luk 24:47). Paul the Apostle of grace described his ministry this way: “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” (Act 26:20). On the other hand, there are passages that command *believing* without mentioning repentance: “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Act 16:31). These and numerous other passages demonstrate that repentance and faith are vitally joined.

¹⁰ behoved – to be necessary or proper for.

Repentance and Forgiveness of Sin Are to Be Preached Together¹¹

Our Lord told His disciples, and us as well, to follow His example in preaching repentance and remission¹² of sins through faith in Christ because this truly shows His ministry while here upon earth. His *first* message as recorded in Mark 1:15 was “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: *repent* ye, and *believe* the gospel.” And His *last* words to His disciples and to us were that repentance and remission of sins through faith in Christ should be preached in His name among all nations beginning at Jerusalem (Luk 24:46-48). Yet it seems that many are afraid to preach repentance today. Our Lord was not afraid to call men to repentance, and He has commissioned us to do the same. So we desire to proclaim to all men that they should repent and believe on Christ’s name for the remission of their sins.

“Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). These are words full of meaning which need to be proclaimed today as well as then. There is true remission of sins through faith in Christ for those who see themselves to be sinners. Ungodly sinners – lost, without God, and without hope, full of sin, full of unrighteousness – should come to Christ, laying down their arms of rebellion and hoisting the white flag of surrender. Unto them God has provided remission of sins. He invites them to come, even as the prodigal came back home.

Repentance and remission are so joined together, that wherever we find one, we are sure to find the other. Where there is no *repentance*, rest assured there is no *faith* in Christ. But where there is true repentance, rest assured there is faith to trust Christ for full and free forgiveness of all sins. Our Lord Jesus Christ declared with authority that “all manner of sin... *shall be forgiven* unto men” (Mat 12:31). It is written in *The Acts of the Apostles*:

“Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Act 5:31).

“Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Act 13:38-39).

¹¹ Throughout the ages there has been debate between the Lord’s children as to which comes first, repentance or faith. Both sides have their advocates among Bible-believing Christians. But regeneration is a miracle that cannot be examined under a microscope. While the miracle of the new birth will always manifest the life of God in man’s soul, we must be careful about putting too strict an order on the way God works out that miracle in a sinner’s life. Since both repentance and faith spring from regeneration, both will be clearly manifested in the Lord’s children. No sinner savingly believes on Christ unless he has changed his mind about sin, God, and Christ. Neither does any sinner truly repent unless he believes God’s Word about his lost condition and the saving power of Jesus Christ. To *overemphasize* faith or repentance can result in at least four errors: 1) overemphasizing repentance as something separate from faith can leave sinners under the impression that they must experience a certain grief or number of tears before they can believe on Christ. 2) Overemphasizing repentance as something separate from faith can leave sinners with the notion that they must stop all sinning before they can believe on Christ. 3) Overemphasizing faith without repentance can leave sinners with the impression that they can “believe on Jesus” without having to be concerned about a changed life. The Gospel calls sinners to come to Jesus as a Savior from *sin*. Jesus did not come to assure sinners that they will go to Heaven even though they remain in a sinful, selfish life; rather Jesus came to call “sinners to repentance” (Mat 9:13; Mar 2:17; Luk 5:32). Sinners will never flee to Jesus as a *Savior* from sin unless they see sin as an evil which offends God and rightly damns them before Him. His name is “JESUS: for he shall save his people *from their sins*” (Mat 1:21). 4) Overemphasis on either repentance *or* faith can lead to erroneous thinking about the proper *ground* of justification. The ground of justification is Jesus Christ and His substitutionary work upon the cross. Repentance looks away from sin and self as faith receives Jesus’ perfect righteousness. Neither repentance nor faith *merit* justification.

¹² remission – pardon; forgiveness.

“And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Act 20:20-21).

The Apostles declared it, and we declare this same truth today.

Repentance Is a Gift of Grace

Now I want to declare upon the authority of God’s Word that *repentance is to be preached in the name of the Lord Jesus as a grace given from above*. It is given by God. Yes, repentance has therefore been granted unto the Gentiles, as well as unto the Jews, because it is a gift of *grace* (Act 11:18). It does not come to us by the works of the law, but it comes wholly and completely out of the gracious heart of God. It should not be preached in Moses’ name as a legal duty, but it is to be preached as a *grace* coming down from God. It is not to be preached as Jonah preached it, without any hope—for he proclaimed that Nineveh would be destroyed in only 40 days—but it is to be preached in Jesus’ name as the *grace* of God.

Repentance is a gift given by the *grace* of God, even as *faith* is given by the grace of God. Our gracious God and Heavenly Father has highly exalted His Son and given Him a name which is above every name, having set Him at His own right hand to be “a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Act 5:31). So it is the *grace* of God, the *goodness* of God that leads to repentance (Rom 2:4).

Wherever there is real sorrow for sin; wherever there is an honest determination by God’s grace to cease from sin; wherever there is a radical change of mind with regard to sin, you can know that this has been produced by the Spirit of God. It is as much a gift of the *covenant of grace* as the pardon that comes with it. And remember, God gives this *grace only to poor sinners*. He makes them realize their need of it. The song writer¹³ expressed it this way:

*Come ye needy, come and welcome, Come, God’s free bounty glorify;
True belief and true repentance, Every grace that brings you nigh;
Without money, come to Jesus Christ and buy.*

By His *grace*, God uses the Law to show you what you are and then brings you to Christ. His Spirit graciously uses the Law to give you the knowledge of sin (Rom 3:19-20; 7:7-25). Therefore, never throw off the Law of God! Yes, it brings you under the wrath of God and condemns you to Hell. But praise God, by the Law of God you see, acknowledge, and understand your sinfulness, your great distance from God, and your great need for a Savior Galatians 3:24 says that the Law is the schoolmaster that leads you to Christ as your only hope. So it is the *grace* of God that produces repentance in your heart and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit will teach you how terribly Christ suffered for your sin, and this truth will be a means of leading you to hate sin. You will realize how the Holy Spirit, by enlightening your understanding and influencing your affections, produces repentance in you—even in that heart that seemed so unbroken and sterile that nothing could be produced in it! Your heart will be broken and made fertile by the gentle dew of the rain of *grace* as it falls in upon your soul. Then by God’s Spirit working in you, you will see a beauty and a glory in the Lord Jesus Christ that will cause you to desire Him, (2Co 4:4, 6; Job 23:3; Song 2:3). You will not only hate sin and sorrow over it (2Co 7:10-11), you will *willingly* turn from it by faith in Christ as you see what it has done to Him.

So God *gives* repentance to sinners; it is one of the free gifts of His grace. And whoever has it may rest assured that the hand of the Lord has been upon him for good.

¹³ Joseph Hart, 1759.

But let us go further. Wherever there is real repentance, it is evidence of faith in Christ operating in your heart! This is evidence that you are alive in Christ! If your heart be turned away from sin, if you prostrate yourself in the dust before God *because* of your sins, if you look with true penitence¹⁴ to Christ upon the cross crying, “Lord, remember me! Lord, save me! God, be merciful to me, and deliver me from going down to the pit,” then repentance and faith are in your heart. You cannot separate them: where you find one, you will find the other.

We have this so beautifully illustrated in the case of the publican recorded in Luke: “And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.” And the Lord said, “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (18:13,14). You see, the Psalmist’s words are still true: “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and *saveth such* as be of a contrite¹⁵ spirit” (Psa 34:18). It was for sinners such as these that our Lord Jesus suffered upon the cross.

So let the message ring out from every land under heaven: wherever a soul repents and turns to Jesus Christ in faith, then God’s grace is already at work and pardon is granted to that soul.

Repentance upon the Authority of Jesus Christ

Let’s go further. Our Lord taught us that repentance preached in the name of Jesus is preached *upon the authority of Jesus as Lord*. Listen! “All power [all authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach [disciple] all nations...in my name” (Mat 28:18-19). This is what He is saying: in the *Name of Jesus* sinners bow down in repentance and every walled fortress of the sinner’s heart falls before God. In the *Name of Jesus* the legion of demons were cast out of the man in the tombs of Gadara. *In the Name* and authority of King Jesus, the sinner is set free through faith in *His* blood. Every sin is pardoned, its power broken, its penalty met, and its dominion gone. In the authority of *His* Name you must come to that Throne of grace, which has been set up for poor sinners by God Himself (Heb 4:16).

God’s Full Pardon Is Promised to Repentant Sinners

The Gospel promises to repenting sinners *a full pardon* from *every* sin they have ever committed, whether a sin of thought, word, or deed; whether a sin of omission or commission.¹⁶ This pardon is as great as it is full. It is a pardon from the most horrible and oft-repeated offenses: uncleanness, theft, blasphemy, rape, drunkenness, yea, whoremongering, adultery, and even murder. It is a pardon for crimes of the deepest dye, a pardon bought with the precious blood of Christ. When we turn to God in true repentance and look to Jesus Christ by faith to cleanse us, we *shall* be saved!

This is the Gospel, the *hope* that God tells us to hold out to sinners. This is not as Jonah, who said, “Forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed!”—he said nothing about repentance. But I tell you with one breath that the wrath of God is coming. Yet with another, if you will repent and turn to God with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, believing the truth of the Gospel, then there is full forgiveness and remission in the blood of the Savior. You see, “The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses us from *all* sin (1Jo 1:7). For all who repent and believe in Him, this blood cleanses from every sin that banishes men from the presence of the thrice-holy God. Yes, I proclaim pardon in the Name of Jesus for sins such as these. They are not too black to be

¹⁴ penitence – regret for wrongdoing

¹⁵ contrite – feeling regret or sorrow for one’s sins.

¹⁶ Sins of *omission* are those things we don’t do which we are commanded to do: James 4:17 “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” Sins of *commission* are those wicked things we do which we are commanded not to do.

forgiven by God. They are not too deeply ingrained to be washed out by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus!

Is God's Forgiveness for You?

But I hear someone saying, "I do not doubt that repentance and remission of sins are to be preached in Christ's name, and that this is the teaching of Christ. My difficulty is, are they for *me*?" Well, that is a point that you must settle under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But let me ask you a few questions: do you repent of your sin? Do you sorrow over sin as the plague of your heart and the curse of your life? Do you hate sin? Do you turn from sin and seek to live as the Holy God would have you to?

Then I say unto you: if this repentance is yours, then this remission is yours also. Christ put them together: "Repentance and remission of sins" (Luk 24:47). And remember, Christ has commanded you to repent and believe (Mar 1:15). What He has commanded, you can by His grace perform.

But if indeed you have not experienced what repentance is, then will you breathe this prayer? "Oh Lord, show me the guilt of my sin, and let me see Thy dear Son bearing its penalty on my behalf. Teach me to mourn over my sins and to loathe them, and assure me by Thy Spirit's gracious instruction from Thy Word that they are all forgiven for Jesus' sake. May I go on my way rejoicing as a sinner saved by Thy sovereign grace." Will you do it?

4. The Means of Repentance

Let us consider now the means by which repentance is worked in the heart.

The Word of God Is the Instrument of Repentance

In true repentance we see a radical change of mind and heart that leads to a complete turnabout of life; this is wrought in the soul by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. But what is the *instrument* He uses? My friend, He uses the Word of God, which He authored, to convict "of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). You see, apart from the Word of God there can be no salvation, for we read in Romans 10:17, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." And 1 Peter 1:23 says, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."

Now with your Bible in hand, let us read Hebrews 4:12-13:

"For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

You see, in true repentance, the Word of God is brought home to our hearts by the Holy Spirit in convicting power so that we might be saved. Paul, in writing to the church of the Thessalonians on this subject says, "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." How? "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance" (1Th 1:4-5). And in salvation, this is exactly the way the Word of God comes home to the heart of every sinner for whom Christ died.

Did you notice the description given of the Word of God in our text, Hebrews 4:12-13? It is spoken of as being "quick," that is, *a living Word*. Our blessed Lord represents it in the same way in John 6:63: "The words that I speak unto you, they are *spirit*, and they are *life*." Yes, the Word of God awakens a sinner to his need of turning to God from his rebellious ways. He will cast down his arms of rebellion, hoist the white flag of surrender, and look by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ to save him, cleanse him from sin, and deliver him from the wrath to come. You see,

God's quickening Spirit uses the Word to give that soul knowledge of his sinfulness before God and knowledge of the Holy God against Whom he has sinned.

"For the Word of God is *quick* and *powerful*"—it is not a mere dead letter that will soon vanish away! No, it *lives* in the mind of God! It *lives* in the decrees of heaven! And it *lives* and *will live forever* in the hearts and minds of all God's redeemed ones because it is *the living Word* of God. It operates in the mind and in the affection and will not leave you alone. It is truly the law of God in the hands of the Holy Spirit which is the schoolmaster to bring you to Christ (Gal. 3:24).

The Word of God Is Powerful

Also this Word spoken of here in our text is *powerful*. Hear the appeal which God Himself makes to you concerning His Word in Jeremiah 23:29: "*Is not My Word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?*" And, I say it is! I believe, yea, I know, that every child of God will say that God's Word burned itself into his soul, and he could not be still until he fell at God's feet in true repentance. His heart was truly *broken* by the powerful Word of God!

The Word of God in the hands of the Holy Spirit is so powerful that it *slays* the soul! Paul says in Romans 7:9, "For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came [home to his heart], sin revived, and I died." The Word of God slew him, because as II Corinthians 3:7 tells us, the Law is the ministration of death. It puts to death your cherished sins, your cherished ambitions, your cherished plans, your self-righteousness, your self-will, and your pride and leaves you at the feet of a sovereign God crying, "God be merciful to me, the sinner!"

You see, the Holy Spirit puts this powerful and living Word into your mind and writes it upon your heart (Heb 8:10; 10:16). You cannot get away from it; it follows you and cries out in your soul, "Thou art the man; thou art the sinner!" I ask: have you ever experienced the slaying work of the Word of God? If not, you are still in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. God's Spirit uses the Word to bring death to the soul before He raises it to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. You *must* be *slain* before you're ever raised to life.

This precious Word is described in 1 Peter 1:23 as *a living Word*. Why? Because by the power of the Holy Spirit it brings life. And, praise the Lord, it can never be destroyed or exterminated! Heaven and earth will pass away, but God's Word shall abide forever (Mat 24:35).

The Word of God Is Effectual

Hebrews 4 also tells us that this Word of God, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, is not only quick and powerful, but *effectual*. It is active, operative, energizing, and effective. It brings conviction—convincing us of sin and the evil of unbelief—for it discerns between good and evil in the most holy thought of the best man and shows him what he is: a sinner before God!

The Holy Spirit will use the Word to convince you that you are spiritually *blind* because of sin. You cannot see the danger you are in nor can you see any beauty in Christ. "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the God of this world hath *blinded the minds* of them which believe not" (2Co 4:3-4).

Then the Word will convince you that you are *deaf* because of sin. You cannot hear the voice of God apart from His effectual call (Mar 8:18). It will convince you that you are defiled, corrupt, and morally unsound because of sin (Gen 6:5; Rom 3:10-12). And it will convince you that you are in a state of spiritual paralysis because of sin. Sin has paralyzed your will, so you have no power to raise yourself from your helpless condition. Romans 5:6 reads, "For when we were yet *without strength...*"

The Word will convince you that your sins have separated you from God (Isa 59:1-2) and have made Him your enemy. And it will convince you that sin has filled your heart and mind

with rebellion, so you will acknowledge that Romans 8:7 is true: you are carnal, *enmity* against God, rebellious against God, and you need true repentance.

Oh my friend, you desperately need the powerful work of the Holy Spirit to write the eternal Word of God upon your hearts! You need to cry out in sorrow for sin and for mercy before God in Christ!

Again, Hebrews 4 tells us that the Word of God in the hands of the Holy Spirit is *sharper than any two-edged sword*. You see, the Word of God is so comprehensive that there is not a thought or purpose in the whole creation that is not within its range: “God knows my downsitteing and mine uprising, He understandeth my thought afar off. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether” (Psa 139:2, 4). Because its Author is spiritual, the Word is spiritual. And it searches men spiritually. When the Holy Spirit brings the Word home to a man’s soul, He convinces him of sins of which he had not the least conception before.

The Word of God Wounds and Makes Alive

God’s Word *wounds* and *makes alive*. It kills self-righteousness, sin, and unbelief. It will bring you to God crying, “Woe is me, for I am undone! I am lost! God be merciful to me, the sinner!” Listen to David’s cry in Psalm 51 as the Word of God forced its way into his heart under conviction:

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly 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. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me...Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow...Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.”

David did not blame his sins on anyone else; he did not blame circumstances or environment. He took the full blame for his sins and repented of them before God. He cried unto Him for mercy and forgiveness. Oh, this is what *you* need today—true biblical repentance. *You* must take the blame before God for your spiritual condition. *You* must confess, “I have sinned and stand guilty. I need the mercy of God in Christ.”

The Word of God Gives No Short Cuts

So many people I meet today are seeking “the deeper life,” when they so desperately need to find their way to the cross of Christ in true brokenness of heart over sin. They are trying to bypass Holy Spirit conviction; therefore, they have missed it all! Let me tell you from the depths of my heart, which goes out to you in compassion: *there is no short cut to the overcoming life!* When confronted with your sin, you must *repent*. The Spirit must open your heart so that by the Word of God, you may see your lost, miserable, and sinful condition. I know you don’t like to hear this, because you love sin. Your pride will not let you admit that you are a sinful hypocrite, a hell-deserving sinner, and the chief of sinners! But remember, you will come this way or perish!

Try whatever you will: whitewash the outside, clean up all you can, go to church, pray, preach, teach, witness, have great religious feelings and experiences. But all of this will not avail you, if the foundation of your Christian life is not laid in the foundation of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We come back to our Lord’s words in Luke 13:5: “Except ye *repent*, ye shall all likewise perish.” There is no getting around it! You will have to face it: if

you do not repent, then there is no salvation in Christ. There *must* be that radical change of mind and heart that leads to a complete turnabout of your life! These words in Luke 13 are not my words. These are the Word of Him Who speaks from heaven. You must hear Him or you will die in your sins (Heb 12:25).

Let me ask you again: Have you ever taken your place before God as David, crying for mercy, as you confessed your sins? If you are a stranger to these exercises of soul, no matter what your profession or performance, no matter how highly you may think of yourself or what others may think of you, God says you are still *dead in your sins!*

But if, by God's grace, His Word has come home to your heart and lifted the veil so you can see what God has seen all the time, then I know that you will cry for mercy. You will cry for the Christ of Calvary to come and save you, to cleanse you by His precious and atoning blood. You will cry for Him to clothe you in His perfect robe of righteousness, so that you may be able to stand before the holy God. *Then* you will prize the Christ of Calvary. *Then* you will forsake all and be found in Him, clothed in His righteousness alone.

This is the way that God calls sinners to salvation in Christ. By His Spirit and Word, He works repentance toward God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ in their hearts. I ask again: has God ever dealt with *your* heart like this? Or are you a stranger to Holy Spirit conviction and God-given repentance and faith?

5. The Fruits of Repentance

In conclusion, let us consider *the fruits which always follow genuine Biblical repentance.*

John the Baptist warned his hearers, "Bring forth therefore fruits meet¹⁷ for repentance" (Mat 3:8). And the Apostle Paul told King Agrippa that his message to the Jews and to the Gentiles was "that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Act 26:20). So from these two Scriptures we learn that true biblical repentance will *show* itself in the believer's life *by its fruits*. Let us look then at some of these fruits. As we do, let us pray that the Holy Spirit will open our understanding to His precious Word and that He will open and search our hearts. May the Lord show us if these fruits are being produced in our lives by the Spirit of the living God.

Repentance Results in a Real Hatred for Sin

First, the fruit of true Biblical repentance in our lives is *a real hatred for sin as sin* and not merely hatred for its *consequence*,¹⁸ which is separation from God in hell forever. This hatred is not against this or that sin, but hatred of *all* sin, and particularly of the root itself which is *self-will*. In Ezekiel 14:6 we read, "Thus saith the Lord God; repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations." We do this with a hatred for them and a loathing of ourselves. This is set forth in Ezekiel 20:43: "Ye shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed." You see, the change of mind which God requires, the change of mind which God is pleased with, is a real hatred for sin as sin *against God*. Therefore, I ask, do you and I have a hatred for sin in this manner? If not, then we have not brought forth the fruits of true Biblical repentance.

¹⁷ meet – suitable.

¹⁸ It is important to understand the difference between a desire to "escape from Hell," which is simply a desire to avoid *the punishment* for our sins, and the desire of a soul to be free from sin itself: "Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Mat 1:21). Fearing Hell and desiring to escape its torments is not wrong in and of itself: "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2Co 5:11). But Biblical redemption is not simply our deliverance from sin's *penalty*, but from that which damns us—sin.

Repentance Results in a Godly Sorrow for Sin

Second, the fruit of true Biblical repentance is a *godly sorrow for sin*. 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 reads, “Ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner...for godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation.” This sorrow consists of grief for having despised such a God, for having rebelled against His authority, and for having been indifferent to His glory. It was a sorrow such as this that caused Peter to go out and weep bitterly over denying his Lord (Mat 26:75). And a sorrow such as this causes *us* to weep bitterly over our sins because they are against God. We are made to cry like David, “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” (Psa 51:3-4).

Have you thus sorrowed for sin as being *against God*? This fruit of true Biblical repentance causes us to “crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24) and to follow God in Christ with all our hearts. Only this kind of sorrow for sin is genuine.

Repentance Results in Confession of Sin

Third, the fruit of true Biblical repentance is *confession of sin*. We read in Proverbs 28:13, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” Yes, there *must* be the fruit of confessing and hiding nothing. You see, you and I both know that it is our nature to *deny* our sins, directly or indirectly, and to minimize or make excuses for them. But when the Holy Spirit works in our souls and brings our sins to light, we must acknowledge them before God.

If true Biblical repentance is working in our hearts, we will find no relief until we confess our sins and lay them bare before God. This is brought out in Psalm 32:3-4 in these words: “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into drought of summer.” You see, only heart-felt confession of our sins will bring us peace with God in Christ. And my friend, this continues in our life until we get to glory. Confession and repentance are part of the believer’s daily prayer, as he pleads 1John 1:9 at the throne of grace: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Repentance Results in an Actual Turning from Sin

Fourth, the fruit of true Biblical repentance is *an actual turning from sin*. True repentance is a radical change of mind and heart that leads to a complete turnabout of our life. “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso *confesseth* and *forsaketh* them shall have mercy” (Pro 28:13). If I really hate sin and sorrow over it, then I shall forsake it. I shall take to heart Isaiah 55:7, which reads, “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.” This is the change of course which God requires. It will show itself in the repenting, believing sinner taking heed to the Word of God which says, “Flee fornication” (1Co 6:18); “Flee from idolatry” (1Co 10:14); “Flee the love of money” (2Ti 6:10-11); “Flee also youthful lusts” (2Ti 2:22). And it will also show itself in putting into practice the positive graces of following after “righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2Ti 2:22). My friend, the question before us is—have you and I, from our hearts, actually turned from sin unto God?

Repentance Results in a Desire for Righteousness and Holiness

Fifth, the fruits of true Biblical repentance will be seen in *a desire to put into practice the Scriptures that teach us to walk in righteousness and true holiness* (Eph 4:24), and to be careful

to maintain good works (Tit 3:8). This, to me, is one of the most distinguishing marks of true Biblical repentance: the desire to walk in a different way—a different course of life than we did before. We read in Hebrews 12:14, “Follow peace with all men, and *holiness*, without which no man shall see the Lord.” So by God’s grace we desire to follow after this peace and holiness because God has given us a new heart. In Matthew 1:21 we read that Christ came to save His people *from* their sins, not *in* their sins. So the heart of the true penitent cries unto God daily to be delivered from sin and self. Again, in Ephesians 1:4 we read, “He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” So by God’s grace we desire to be holy, delivered from our sin and self-will. And in 1 Thessalonians 4:7 we read, “For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.” So by God’s grace, we desire to walk worthy of this calling unto holiness.

Then in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 we read that the will of God for our lives is for us to be *sanctified*—to be set apart for God’s holy use. So we desire by God’s grace to be separated from sin unto Christ. By desiring righteousness, walking in true holiness, and being careful to maintain good works, we manifest the fruits of Biblical repentance in our lives. For we read in Titus 2:11-12:

“The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.”

And this is the desire of our hearts! Our cry is, “O Lord, help me to understand Thy Word, and by Thy grace help me walk in the way that is well-pleasing unto Thee.” Or like that of the Psalmist: “Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day” (Psa 25:4-5). And, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psa 73:25), so teach me Thy way, and lead me in plain paths that I will follow Thee all the days of my life.

These then, are the fruits of true Biblical repentance:

- a deep desire to be finished with sin, because it is the plague and sorrow of our hearts
- a deep desire to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul
- a desire to fight the good fight of faith
- a deep desire never to go back to a way of self-will and self-pleasing, but to show forth the praises of Him Who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light
- a deep desire to follow the Lord in a path of holiness all the days of our lives
- a deep desire to please Him in all our ways
- a deep desire to judge ourselves before Him every day and to live at His feet with broken hearts and contrite spirits.

Conclusion

True Biblical repentance cannot be separated from true saving faith; the two always go together. He who truly repents truly believes, for the same Holy Spirit Who gives us repentance to the acknowledging of our sinful conduct before God and gives us a desire to confess and forsake it with true godly sorrow, will also turn our eyes upon yon lovely Lord Who died in our place. The Word of God reveals that the Holy Spirit never separates repentance and faith. Where you find one, you will find the other in the life of the saved soul. Praise the name of our thrice-holy God! He, Who gives saving faith, also gives repentance!

Faith finds in Christ a complete Savior. We find in Christ peace because He made peace by the blood of His cross. We find in Christ hope, and hope is not made ashamed because the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We find in Christ a perfect

standing before God, Who makes Christ wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption unto us (1Co 1:30). We find in Christ a perfect hiding place from the wrath of God against our sins because the judgment of all of our sins has fallen upon Christ (Isa 53). We find in Christ all that God gives to poor, repenting, believing sinners; for we find that we are complete in Him, the Savior of our souls, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Repentance looks away from self to Christ in faith and finds in Him a sufficient Savior for every need. Let us look to Him in true Biblical repentance. It is the need of the hour.

