

Turning Away From Sin

The Bible is clear that in order to be saved we must repent. Repentance isn't optional! John the Baptist preached repentance:

Matthew 3:1-2: “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 Lord Jesus Christ also preached repentance:

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

In fact, Jesus specifically said that the reason He came into this world was to call sinners to repentance:

Matthew 9:13: “But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

In the church today there seems to be a lot of confusion about the nature of repentance. However, this isn't a confusing topic. Repentance is very straightforward. It includes three elements.

Recognition

The first element is that we must recognize that the things we've done are evil in God's sight. We must learn enough about God's commands to recognize that we've broken them, and we

must also agree that breaking His commands is wrong. If we don't take this step then we'll never go to God for forgiveness at all, because we won't see anything in our life that requires His forgiveness.

The apostle John put it this way:

1 John 1:8-10: “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. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

We must agree that we've indeed sinned against God, and we must also confess our sins to God and seek His forgiveness for them.

However, we can't stop there. There are two other pieces of repentance that are vital.

Sorrow

The second element is sorrow. All those who genuinely repent of their sins are sorry about them. They are filled with regret over the things they have done. They feel bad that they've sinned:

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

Romans 6:21: “What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.”

If you're not sorry about your sins then you haven't actually repented of them. For example, if a murderer kills a dozen people but isn't sorry about it then it's obvious he hasn't repented. A murderer who kills people without regret isn't repentant! Likewise, a sinner who sins without regret hasn't repented either.

This is what true repentance looks like:

Nehemiah 9:1-2: “Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.”

These people were deeply sorry for their sins. They publicly demonstrated their grief over their sin by fasting, wearing sackcloth, and by confessing their sins.

This doesn't mean we have to fast and wear sackcloth in order to be forgiven for our sins. However, their actions showed the depth of their sorrow over their sin. If we don't have sorrow over our sin then we haven't repented.

Turn From Sin

When John the Baptist preached about repentance, he told people that their actions revealed whether they had truly repented:

Matthew 3:8: “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:”

This is a very simple concept. A person's life reveals the nature of their heart. The Bible teaches that those who have truly repented of their sin have also *turned away from those sins*. For example:

Proverbs 14:16: “A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident.”

Those who fear God depart from evil. That means they don't keep committing those same sins! If a murderer claims to have repented but keeps murdering people then it's pretty obvious he hasn't changed. Likewise, a person who claims to have repented but keeps committing the same sins hasn't actually repented. The reason we know this is because he hasn't turned away from the evil things he was doing.

Those who are forgiven are those who have confessed *and forsaken* their sins:

Proverbs 28:13: “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”

It's not enough to just confess your sins. You *must* turn away from them. If someone murders a bunch of people and confesses those murders but keeps killing people then it's obvious the person is still a murderer. The fruits of his life reveals his heart. His murderous nature hasn't changed. His repentance means nothing because he's the same person he was before. He hasn't brought forth the fruits of repentance.

God requires more than just confessing our sins. He commands us to turn away from them and learn to walk in His ways:

Isaiah 1:16-18: “Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though

your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

Forgiveness comes to those who stop doing evil – not to those who confess their sin and then keep living in it. *This is very important!* God won't save those who pray “Lord, please forgive me for my sin. However, I'm going to keep on sinning because I love my sin. I have no intention of ever turning away from my sin, but I want You to forgive me anyway.” People who pray that type of prayer aren't saved. There's no salvation which allows people to continue to live wicked lives.

God wants people to turn to Him with all their heart:

Joel 2:12-13: “Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.”

Do you know what it means to turn to God with all your heart? Do you know what it means to give your heart to God? It means you're asking God to change your heart into one that pleases Him. It means you're asking Him to take away your wicked heart and give you a righteous one. It means you're asking God to change your core nature: your desires, your hopes, and your dreams.

You see, sin comes from our heart. When we sin we're revealing the true nature of our heart. Part of repentance includes asking God to change us so that we *don't sin any longer*. A person who's truly repentant *wants* God to change their heart so they're no longer the type of person who does wicked things. A murderer who's genuinely repentant doesn't want to be a murderer anymore, and wants God to change him into a better person.

I'm not saying we're saved by our works, or that we must maintain good works in order to maintain our salvation. What I *am* saying is that genuine salvation always results in a changed life. *Always*. If we continue to live a wicked life then that means we have a wicked heart – and if our heart is still evil then we haven't been made a new person in Christ and are still lost:

1 John 2:3-5: “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.”

The reason Christians keep God's commandments is because He's saved them and changed them. God has given them a new heart, and because of that they do what's right in His sight. Their obedience is a *result* of salvation, not its cause. Since God has saved them, they walk in His ways.

There are some people who seek salvation but don't want to walk in God's ways. They want to continue to live in sin without suffering the consequences of sin. That's not repentance! Those who go down that road will find themselves in Hell.

The Consequences of Sin

In order to be saved you must do more than simply confess your sins. You must do more than acknowledge your sins were wrong and feel sorry about them. You must also give your heart to God. You must seek that God will change your heart and transform you into a person who obeys His commandments. You must turn away from your life of sin and wickedness, and seek God's grace to do what's right in His sight. That's the only way to be saved.

Those who seek to continue on in their sin, and who live

wicked lives, are not saved:

1 Corinthians 6:9-11: “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

Those who continue to sin will receive the wages of sin. This passage is telling us that all genuine Christians have turned away from their sins. Although they did wicked things in the past, they've turned away from those things and no longer do them. Those who continue to live in sin don't know God:

Ephesians 5:5-7: “For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them.”

It's foolish to think that God will forgive those who refuse to turn away from their sins. God is clear that He will forgive those who turn away from their sins, not those who continue to hold on to them:

Romans 2:4-9: “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering;

not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile;”

What does God seek? He seeks those who will humble themselves and turn from their wicked ways:

2 Chronicles 7:14: “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

It's true that Christians aren't sinless. However, true Christians wage war against their sin. They hate it, and they seek God's grace so that they might turn away from their sin and do what's right in His sight. That's one of the signs of a true Christians. Those who love their sin, or defend it, or refuse to turn away from it, don't know God and aren't saved.

God rejects the worship and praise of those who are still living wicked lives:

Amos 5:21-24: “I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither

will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.”

Sin is the opposite of righteousness. If you're holding on to your sin then you don't have righteousness. You must turn away from your sin in order to be saved.