

*"I did not come with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:1-2).*

# Repentance

## What Is Repentance?

**The Old** Testament portion of the Bible is filled with the call to repentance. In the New Testament, the Gospels begin with John the Baptist introducing the Lord Jesus Christ by calling people to repentance (Matthew 3:2). When Jesus and His disciples went forth to preach, the first words on their lips were, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15). Repentance is where it all begins.

Repentance is to cease, in all matters of life, from being independent of God.

The word "repent" has become an archaic and much misunderstood word. It has become a "funny word," a choice word for humor and mockery. Let me tell you, however, that one cannot possibly hear a more serious or important word. Repentance is the one and only gateway to God, through which every soul must one day pass if he or she is to have life. The soul that finds this funny can only be pitied.

It is said that repentance is the changing of one's mind - the determination to stop sinning, that is, the willful decision to stop breaking God's laws. These things are all true. However, repentance is more than that, or, at least, it can be described in different terms to understand how great a thing it is.

Repentance is nothing less than the complete relinquishing of one's right to one's self. It is to cease, in all matters of life, from being independent of God in any way or any thing. If we presume to govern our lives and make decisions based on our desires, preferences, and understanding, we are unrepentant and living in sin, no matter how exemplary or virtuous our lives are deemed to be. On the other hand, if we unconditionally yield up our right to ourselves and surrender to God, we are repentant.

Truly, we never had a right to ourselves. That is because we did not originate in ourselves. We did not create ourselves. God created us, and we are therefore His. Being His, He has full rights to us. We have no rights but such as are subordinate to Him.

**Some have** presumed to have experienced repentance or salvation, because they struck an agreement with God that goes something like this: "God, if You get me out of this mess, if You heal me, if You save me, I will dedicate my life to serving You. I will do anything You ask." That is not repentance; it is a bargain. It is a spurious conversion, an act

and attitude of righteousness coming from a sinful person who is totally incapable of honoring any kind of agreement or bargain with God.

**Without all of these vital elements, repentance is not complete.**

The very first step of faith toward God is repentance. So how can there be any spiritual progress with a person unless there is the first step in completion? Let us examine the nature of true repentance before God:

**A prime component of repentance is the *acceptance of consequences* for sin:** “I am guilty. I deserve whatever punishment God is pleased to administer to me and I will avoid it no longer. I would rather have my debt cleared than pretend it isn’t there or hide it from those against whom I have sinned.”

Without all of the vital elements, repentance is not complete. Those elements are: **one**, acknowledgment of the sin; **two**, [confession](#) of the sin; **three**, candidness about the sin; **four**, sorrow for the harm done to those sinned against, not for the consequences of the sin; **five**, full acceptance of the consequences for the sin; **six**, apologies and restitution when and where possible; **seven**, complete desire to never commit that sin again; and **eight**, total dependence on the Savior Jesus Christ to keep one from ever committing the sin again.

Take out any one of those eight elements and there is not a genuine wrought-of-God repentance.

Consider that these eight elements compose only the first step of a walk of faith, and these elements come together as the parts of a body come together. As a body does not come in separate parts, but as a whole and single unit, so genuine repentance does not come in separate parts. Should your neighbor come to visit you, he will not come piece by piece; he will come in one intact body.

We know that repentance can’t be made up or forced on anyone. The elements we mention are solely the true marks that indicate or prove that true repentance exists.

**Repentance is total surrender to God.**

And true repentance is the heart acknowledgment of God as Creator, Sustainer, and Rightful Governor of all His creation. Repentance is to confess not only with the tongue, but also with the entire life, that Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

We are not our own to do with as we please. To acknowledge, not with the lips only, not with the mind only, but with the heart, that we are not our own, that we are His, that is repentance. To acknowledge that we are His for all time, in all things, beginning not only now, but from the time we first existed, that is repentance.

To say, “Not my will, but Thine be done,” is repentance. Instead of saying (by our lives and attitudes), “You are not going to tell *me* what to do,” it is saying, “*You* are Lord, *my* Lord. All that I am and have is Yours. Never was it mine, nor ever will it be. Do with me as it pleases You, whatever it may be, whether I like it or not, want it or not, choose it or not.”

**Repentance is** not a matter of religion. It is not a matter of choosing a lifestyle. It is not a matter of accepting a doctrine or set of doctrines. It is not a matter of “going to church,” or going to seminary or Bible School. Repentance is total surrender to God.

Repentance is not a demonstration or performance of any kind to others. It is not a show of piety or humility or heroism. It is not a matter of deciding to be godly or saintly. It is not a matter of asceticism (making one’s self suffer pain or deprivation). It is not a matter of a commitment to some cause or great work. It is not a matter of giving one’s self to total sacrifice. Repentance is refraining completely from depending in any way on one’s own power or ability to come into favor with God, and trusting completely in God to do the job instead. Repentance is turning completely from depending on oneself, to depending on God to make one right.

Repentance is a surrender of body, soul, and spirit to God. It is acknowledging that He is Lord of all, that He governs all things, and that unless He wills anything in our lives, it does not happen.

Repentance is to decide to see all of existence as God sees it. It is to recognize that God is active and involved in everything, and to agree with how He sees and does all.

**There are** only two ways to look at existence. Man is in control or God is in control. Man either believes that he has the right and the ability to determine his own course or that God has the right and the ability to determine *all* things pertaining to, and for, him. There are only two kinds of persons in this world, “theists” and “atheists.” There are no agnostics. You are either for or against God. There is no middle ground.

Yes, it is written that devils believe in one God, and tremble. However, Jesus said to His enemies that they were of their father the devil, and that they did not believe. Devils profess to believe, and they do; they know there is Almighty God, but that is not enough. True belief includes love and obedience. Does an atheist love and obey?

**It is proving to one’s self that God is God in and over all things.**

Man is either self-centered or God-centered. Repentance is to decide that man will forever relinquish the throne, scepter, and crown of his life to God, unconditionally. Only those who believe with the heart believe and obey God, and only God can change the heart and enable it to believe. For us, it is sheer impossibility.

Repentance is to accept that how we see things can be wrong, no matter how right they may seem to be. It is the willingness, at all costs, to be wrong in that which we have been convinced is right.

Repentance is a jump over the cliff into free fall, with sure destruction at the end, if God does not intervene or resurrect from the dead.

Repentance is deciding that unless God does it, it won't be done. It is proving to one's self that God is God in and over all things. Repentance is faith in action.

We know so much, and we know so little. The more we know, the less we know, until one day, we know it all, and we know nothing.

**Repentance is impossible!** There is not a human being on earth who is capable of repentance, and there has never been. Ever since Eve was deceived and Adam partook of the forbidden fruit with her, man was enslaved to do his own thing. He locked himself in a burglarproof vault, presuming to keep all the treasure thereof, and tossed away the key. His hope perished the day he disobeyed and stole himself from God. If God did not come and open that vault, man would perish. He has no way of changing himself or his lot.

Man is not only chained in any ability to redeem himself or to reverse his disobedience; he is also chained in that he believes, with a false hope, that he can save himself. Man has been clawing with his fingernails at the twelve-foot-thick solid steel walls of the vault, banging his head against them, and kicking and cursing at them. He has been trying to think of every possible way to escape, and all attempts have been utterly useless.

Man tries to come to terms with the Owner of the vault. He has bargained, reasoned, and argued with Him; begged, flattered, and screamed at the vault Owner. He has promised to be good, pretended to love, made sacrifices, guaranteed to pay all damages and to reward the Owner if the Owner would only listen to him, see it his way, and accommodate or entertain his thoughts and ideas. He says that locking himself in the vault was not his fault, that it was a mistake, and that he would never do it again if he were to have another opportunity. He also argues that if only the vault Owner would give him some help, or even only enough time, he would find his way out.

**Repentance is a sheer gift of God, undeserved.**

There comes a time when the prisoner must recognize that all is futile, that he, by his own fault, locked himself in, that the Owner really doesn't need him for any of his supposed virtues, and that he has no power whatsoever to undo his predicament. He must come to

the place where he relies strictly on the Owner's **judgment, good will, and mercy**. He must recognize that the Owner is not obligated to him in any way, at any time, except as He would choose to obligate Himself. That is repentance.

**Repentance is** a sheer gift of God, undeserved. It does not originate in the one who repents. If a person experiences genuine repentance, it is strictly because God has granted that person the most precious of gifts. God opens the vault of His own volition, in His chosen time, without price and without trade.

There is no light in the vault. It is perfect darkness within. This is the third chain. Man, however, has become quite acquainted with the vault. He has come to forget he is in a vault, or that there is any other option. He has become comfortable without light, food, and water. He has become a creature of darkness; satisfied, yet not satisfied; full, yet hungry; comfortable, yet restless; with eyes, yet blind; with ears, yet deaf; with a mind presuming to know much, yet void of understanding. This great darkness is the third chain.

Jesus Christ is the one and only Light, and He alone has the keys to death and hell. The vault is death and hell, from which there is no escape but by Him. He is the Owner of the vault. The Owner has the keys. He is the one, sure, and only hope of the world. He **is** the Key. The combination to the lock on the safe is death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus Christ accomplished all that, and leads the way for us to follow Him into that same death, burial, and resurrection. There is no other way.

Repentance is more than a mere change in outlook. It is the beginning of a transition from darkness to light, from hate to love, from ignorance to knowledge, from hell to heaven, from death to life.

The prison door will open when God determines, and the man will be free to come out and to live. He will have light to see the constriction and darkness of the vault, in contrast to the new, wide open spaces. He will have food and drink and freedom to come and go and he will be very thankful. He will no longer trust in himself; he will trust in God through Jesus Christ, the only begotten (raised from the dead) Son by the power of the resurrection. His life will have just begun, and the Lord Jesus Christ will be his reason for living. That is repentance; there is no other kind.

**Repentance is the initiatory stage of reconciliation with God.**

**With genuine** repentance is the discovery that the Kingdom of God reigns supreme over all and that all things are determined from above.

With repentance comes **the beginning** of the power to determine right from wrong.

With repentance comes **the beginning** of life, hope, peace, joy, love, understanding, true righteousness, purpose, and direction. It is written:

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. Stubborn fools despise wisdom and discipline” (Proverbs 1:7).

Repentance is the initiatory stage of reconciliation with God. It is the introduction to receiving His Spirit. With repentance, in due time, God comes to dwell within the person. Another work then begins, a work as great as, or greater than, the one before, until the penitent soul enters rest, the third and final stage. Of that stage, dimension, and realm, it is written:

“Everyone who wins the victory this way will wear white clothes. I will never erase their names from the Book of Life. I will acknowledge them in the presence of My Father and His angels” (Revelation 3:5).

And:

“I will make everyone who wins the victory a pillar in the temple of My God. They will never leave it again. I will write on them the Name of My God, the name of the City of My God (the New Jerusalem coming down out of Heaven from My God), and My new Name” (Revelation 3:12).

Repentance takes the soul out of the slums and into a posh neighborhood, out of back alleys, rummaging for garbage to eat, into a palace of sumptuous dining.

**Be warned**, however, you must count the cost. Do not listen to charlatans and false preachers who gather souls to themselves in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, selling you religion as merchandise. They are everywhere, pretending to serve God, to have revelation, to be ministers of God, to love you (if ever so sincerely), but seeking their own gain. True repentance is not an eternal joy ride. It will cost you your life. Of the apostles Paul and Barnabas, it is written that they were:

“... confirming the souls of the disciples, calling on them to continue in the faith and that through much tribulation we must enter into the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

**Beware of the counterfeit, of copycats.**

Lest anyone should think differently, a disciple is not a special calling among Christians. A disciple is a Christian, and a Christian is a disciple. If one is not a disciple, one is not a Christian, and vice versa. A Christian is one who has experienced repentance as I have defined it here, according to Holy Scripture, which, by the way, true disciples, Christians, penitents, love.

Paul also wrote to Timothy, saying:

“Yea, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12).

Beware of the counterfeit, of copycats. There are cheapie and preferable repentances out there for bargain prices. Confession of Jesus Christ with the lips (“[accepting Jesus into the heart as Savior](#)”) with church membership and attendance is the most common, popular and deceptive copycat message of salvation preached.

While it is true that Jesus Christ is Savior, that one does not earn his or her salvation, that fellowship with believers is desirable and important, and that Jesus Christ comes to dwell within the believing penitent if he or she continues in repentance to the receiving of the Spirit, it is not true that it is easy or simple or quickly and completely accomplished. Jesus declared:

“And calling near the crowd with His disciples, He said to them, Whoever will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me” (Mark 8:34).

**Make no** mistake. The genuine article is free, but it will cost you your life. Jesus said:

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he may have enough to finish it; lest perhaps, after he has laid the foundation and is not able to finish, all those seeing begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish” (Luke 14:28-30).

It is written:

“And Jesus said to him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. And He said to another, Follow Me! But he said, Lord, first allow me to go and bury my father. Jesus said to him, Let the dead bury their dead, but you go and proclaim the Kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow You, but first allow me to take leave of those in my house. And Jesus said to him, No one, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God” (Luke 9:58-62).

**All aspects of repentance require a work of grace and revelation by the Lord.**

There are four aspects to the walk of repentance:

1. **Repentance of past sins.** This is sorrow over, and repudiation of, past acts and ways contrary to the Law of God, and is most commonly what people refer to when speaking of repentance.
2. **Repentance of sinning.** This is acknowledgement of guilt and repentance from current sins. This is also widely considered to be repentance. However, there is more.
3. **Forgiveness of all persons for any and all offenses, actual and perceived, past and present, committed against one.** There is no forgiveness from God for a person who will not forgive. Forgiveness is a crucial element of repentance. One who has not

forgiven has not repented.

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15 KJV).

Now here is a revelation. This aspect of repentance is rarely spoken about. I say it is the core of repentance:

4. **A change of mind or attitude towards all things people did and taught that captivated one’s pride or mind, but which were not good, though they appeared to be good or at least harmless.**

For example, a mother may have babied her child, giving him all the attention he wanted, and lavishly praised him. The child, therefore, could grow up with an inordinate self-importance, expecting praise and honor from others, not knowing any better. The mother’s affection may have appeared to be valid, if not necessary. After all, should not a mother love and encourage her child? Many also think it honorable to be proud or to have an inflated ego falsely called self-esteem or confidence.

One must forsake ungodly forms of attitude and behavior, of actions committed and pleasures partaken, now and in the past, and recognize them for what they are. “That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination with God,” said Jesus. This can only happen when candidates for repentance are taught right living, perspective, and attitude.

All of these aspects or elements of repentance require a work of grace and revelation by the Lord of hosts. No one can take these steps in his or her own power:

“For it is God Who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13 MKJV).

Victor Hafichuk

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