



“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

Repentance

Central Truth: Repentance effects a change in the mind, emotions, and will.

L408. Date: September 1989. **Text:** Acts 3:18-26. **Topic:** Repentance.

Repent!

You will not read very far in Holy Scripture before you come across that word. The word occurs in some form a total of 741 times in the Bible (680 in the Old Testament and 61 in the New Testament). It is very much a Bible doctrine and a divine imperative.

Repentance is the first step of a person in his return to God. It is not a comfortable doctrine when one has sinned. It calls to mind disobedience to God and wrongs toward people; it arouses a sense of guilt. People want to be left alone in their sins. But we must preach repentance because the kingdom of God is at hand.

The basic meaning of the word repent is to “turn.” It pictures a person realizing the error of his way (whether his sin is omission or commission) and turning from it to the right way. It means a change of mind — the way a person thinks about God and sin. It means a change of emotion — a person loses his love for sin and is sorry he has sinned against God. It means a change of will — a person yields to the will of God and follows Him. May this study lead you to repentance if there is any area of your life which grieves the Holy Spirit.

I. THE CALL TO REPENTANCE

New Testament preaching included a dominant note of repentance. It

was the message of John the Baptist who came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, “*Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 3:2). Jesus took up that same message in His early preaching ministry (Matthew 4:17).

Repentance was the message of the apostles. When Jesus sent them out on their first preaching mission, they preached that people should repent (Mark 6:12). After Pentecost, they continued that same message (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 20:21). Recognizing it as the one great command that God had given to the entire human race, they called for repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ.

Repentance was the message that Jesus said was to be preached in all the world (Luke 24:47). It is the only alternative to destruction (Luke 13:3; II Peter 3:9) and must be proclaimed clearly and fervently.

That is still a needed message today. Much of today's religion neglects God's call to repentance. But a preacher cannot be true to the full revelation of God if he neglects this basic doctrine. As long as people have sinned, the call to repentance is appropriate. We must speak it, hear it, and heed it to have the blessings of God.

II. THE NEED FOR REPENTANCE

There are two great reasons why repentance is required. Each is strongly emphasized in the Bible.

A. Repentance is needed because all have sinned. The solemn witness of Paul in Romans 3:19-23 testifies that Jew and Gentile have sinned against God. Not a person can declare in truth that he is innocent of that offense. Since sin is a transgression of God's law, every person has an account before God which must be settled. It is impossible to settle that account in any way other than the path of repentance.

B. Repentance is needed because it is the only way back to God. One who has sinned is on a way which leads away from God. The only way back is to turn. That turning from sin to God is what the Bible calls repentance. God opens His heart to sinners everywhere and cries, “*Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, . . . for why will ye die. . . ? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye*” (Ezekiel 18:30-32). To fail to turn is to die. Do you see why repentance is so essential?

III. THE NATURE OF REPENTANCE

A. Repentance is a change of mind. It means to have another mind. In particular, it means to understand and admit one's true condition. It is related to what we call "*conviction of sin.*" Jesus tells of a son who rejected his father's request to work in the vineyard, but afterwards repented and went. The lad probably thought, "It was not right for me to talk to Dad that way. He would not have asked me to work if he had not needed me. I live in this home and should help with the duties of maintaining it." Thus he "*repented*" (changed his thinking) and went to the vineyard to work. To repent means to change one's mind.

B. Repentance is a change in the emotions. It is related to regret, grief, and shameful guilt. Particularly, it means that one is sorry that he has sinned against a holy God. But there is the added element that one's love for sin dies in the heart. He had rather have peace with God than to enjoy whatever pleasure sin may have given him. He cries out to God, "*Be merciful to me a sinner*" (Luke 18:13). But his words are more than words alone. They express the desire of his heart. They arise from a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart which God desires the sinner to have (Psalm 51:17). Joy in sin is replaced by sorrow for sin when one truly repents.

C. Repentance is a change of the will. Based on what the sinner thinks and what he feels, he resolves to turn from sin to God. The turning is not simply the response to emotion. If so, that resolve will die when the emotion subsides. It is an act of the will which says, "I will settle my account with God. I will give up the right to continue any longer in sin. I turn to God and surrender to Him." There is no true repentance without that act of the will.

That act of the mind, emotion, and will involves three things in true repentance. (1) There must be a confession of sin to God (I John 1:9; Proverbs 28:13). It is not necessary to name every sin, but there must be a confession of personal guilt. (2) There must be a forsaking of sin. Repentance is not a tearful cheek washing between sinful binges (Isaiah 55:7; John 8:11). Forsaking sin is the true sign of real repentance. (3) There must be a yielding to God. Trust Jesus as Savior and surrender to Him as Lord; then you have experienced repentance.

Jesus told the story of the two sons, both of whom were prodigals (Luke 15:11-32). One prodigal son left home; the other prodigal son stayed home. Look at the repentance of the prodigal son who left home. In the hog pen of a foreign employer, he changed his mind about his father's house. ("The servants there are better off than I am.") He changed in his emotions. ("Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight.") He changed in

his will. (“I will arise and go to my father. . . . And he arose and went.”) What a picture of real repentance. That is the way you or I must come to God when we have sinned. Is the way clear to you?

IV. THE BLESSING OF REPENTANCE

A. Salvation comes to one who repents. The Bible says, “*Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death*” (11 Corinthians 7:10). One is converted to Christ only when he has truly repented of his sins. Any other course is but to perish.

B. Rejoicing comes in heaven when a sinner repents. Jesus told of a shepherd who lost one of his one hundred sheep. He secured the ninety-nine in the fold and sought for the lost one. When he found it, he brought it home with joy. Jesus said, “*Likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth*” (Luke 15:7). Who rejoices there? It may be the departed saints, the angels, or even God himself who delights to save sinners.

C. Rejoicing comes on earth when a sinner repents. The father of the prodigal son had a great feast when his son returned home. All the household rejoiced. When Philip took the gospel into Samaria, “*there was great joy in that city*” (Acts 8:8). Lead a sinner to Christ and you will rejoice, too.

Who needs to repent? Sinners need to repent and trust Jesus. God has exalted Jesus for that very reason (Acts 5:31). But saints need to repent, also. The Christian life is a life of repentance and seeking a closer walk with God (Revelation 2, 3). Repentance is not fear of punishment, tears, or good intentions. It is a conscious turning from sin to God. “*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out*” (Acts 3:19).

Questions

1. How important is the Bible teaching on repentance?
2. What is the meaning of the term repent?
3. What place did repentance have in New Testament preaching?
4. Why should repentance be preached today?
5. How is the mind involved in repentance?
6. How are the emotions involved in repentance?

7. How is the will involved in repentance?
8. How are those three things illustrated in the repentance of the prodigal son?
9. What blessings does God give when one repents?
10. How can you apply this study to your life?