



In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

*‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.*

*⁵ Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall become straight,
and the rough places shall become level ways,*

⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

⁷ He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”⁸ Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ⁹ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?” ¹¹ And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” ¹² Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” ¹³ And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.”¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”

¹⁵ As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, ¹⁶ John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

18 So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.

Last week we started on the topic of repentance. First, I want to do a quick summary from last week.

True Repentance...

1. Prepares the way for the Lord.

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus through repentance and our full enjoyment of Jesus is likewise prepared through regular repentance.

2. Assumes God's righteous standard.

The call to repentance assumes that God has a righteous standard and that we have violated that standard. Otherwise, there would be no need to repent. Repentance calls us back to that standard and back to God.

3. Is not a work.

A wrong idea of repentance claims that we need to clean up our lives and stop sinning before we get saved, but that would turn repentance into a work. God does not ask you to stop sinning before you get saved but repentance is a turning away from your sin and a turning toward God.

4. Has a recognition of sin, a sorrow for sin and a seeking of forgiveness.

We compared the false repentance of Judas with the true repentance of Peter. Both had a recognition of their sin and a sorrow for their sin but only Peter sought forgiveness. Judas turned away from God, but Peter turned toward God in repentance. That is the key that demonstrates that a person had Godly grief and not merely worldly grief.

5. True repentance cannot be separated from true faith.

No genuine believer would deny that faith in Christ is necessary for salvation. As we have seen, some believers do deny that repentance is necessary, though they may just have a wrong definition of repentance. Even better is to understand that faith and repentance are inseparable from one another.

In Acts 20 Paul said, "how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Repentance and faith working as two sides of the same coin.

In John 6, Jesus said, All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out (John 6:37). In chapter seven he said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:37-38) Coming to Jesus is the same thing as belief. Coming to Jesus is repentance—it is a turning toward God.

We can go to the old testament for more truth.

Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;

let the wicked forsake his way
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the LORD that he may have mercy on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (Isaiah 55:6-7)

This beautiful Scripture has multiple expressions of both faith and repentance. You forsake both your wicked ways and your unrighteous thoughts, then you seek the Lord, call upon him and return to him. Genuine repentance and faith brings the miraculous gifts of mercy and pardon. This is the two-sided coin of faith and repentance working together.

In the PDF that will be posted online, I will include another dozen or so Scriptures that show the necessity of repentance for salvation. We know that faith is required but we harm the gospel by also not including repentance. It's much easier to simply believe something than it is to forsake your current path in life. I think this is one reason we have so many false converts. We have cheapened God's grace and created an oversimplified path to God where you simply pray a prayer or state your belief. People think they can hold onto their sin and just add a little Jesus into their lives. These false converts have never turned from their sin.

Rightly understood, belief is itself a form of repentance. Let's say that choosing your religion is like choosing between the three doors of Monty Hall's Let's Make a Deal. If you're old enough to remember the show, contestants were given the choice to take whatever lied behind door #1, door #2 or door #3. If you choose door #2, you are clearly rejecting door #1 and door #3. If you believe the prize lays behind door #2, you are therefore rejecting the other options. Do you see? Belief in one direction automatically means a turning away from—a repentance from—the other two options. The same would be in marriage. Once you say "I do," you have chosen to forsake all other men and women as potential spouses. You have turned away from all others and have chosen your husband or your wife.

Rightly understood, this is the way belief in Christ works as well. By choosing to follow Jesus, you are categorically turning away from all other options. In this sense, your repentance is built into your belief. But the problem is that in the real world, it usually does not work this way. If you do not make repentance crystal clear, instead of choosing Jesus as their only hope of salvation, most people will merely add Jesus to what they already believe. This is called syncretism, which is a joining together of creeds and beliefs. This is one of the ways that Roman Catholicism spread so rapidly. Rather than reject the pagan gods they were serving, people were taught to add Christianity to their existing religion. Roman Catholicism in Haiti is a prime example. To the untrained eye, it might look like Christianity but underneath it is mostly voodoo worship.

Most of the Old Testament is filled with syncretism. Israel had the Tabernacle, but they also worshipped the pagan gods of the surrounding nations. Once the Temple was built, this practice continued. This went on for almost a thousand years. During the reign of the judges, this was the purpose of each judge. First, they would call the people to repentance from idolatry. Then God would strengthen the judge to defeat the enemy. They would worship the lord for a while until they fell into idolatry again. Then the cycle would repeat itself. But notice that they never completely abandoned their temple worship. They did not choose the pagan gods over the Lord,

they just added them to the Lord. They didn't turn away from paganism to worship God alone they just added them to what they were already doing.

This is syncretism. And this can happen if repentance is not combined with belief, as it should be. If we don't tell people to turn away from their sin and current path, they will just add belief in Jesus to what they are already worshipping. If people are not called to abandon their sin they are more likely to hold onto their sin. If they can have their sin and Jesus at the same time, why would they not choose to add Jesus to their lives? Belief in Jesus is like an insurance policy for them. They believe in Jesus "just in case." When this happens we can either get false converts or converts who have never understood how and why they should strive toward holiness in their lives. The false converts are in serious condition because they think they are saved. They believe in Jesus but have never forsaken their sin. They have a false assurance so when they hear the gospel, they don't take action.

But if this at all describes you or someone you know, the answer to the problem is the same as it is for any true believer—repentance and faith. We repent and we believe. If you think you may have never done this, it is as simple as turning from your sin—the path that you are on right now—and trusting Jesus completely for your salvation. This is where the intersection of repentance for justification and repentance for sanctification meet together.

A go to text is often 1 John 1:9. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Tell me—is this repentance of someone who was not yet saved or repentance of a true believer? We usually use this text when we are talking about repentance of the believer, that we need to continue to repent throughout our walk with the Lord. And I agree that repentance is absolutely necessary for Christian growth, however, I think that this verse is describing justification, not sanctification.

Think about it. When a genuine believer confesses their sin, do they receive forgiveness and a cleansing from all unrighteousness? No, they don't because forgiveness and cleansing has already taken place. Salvation is a one-time event. It doesn't happen again and again. Furthermore, if you look at verses 3-10 of 1 John, it will become apparent that in every way, unbelievers are being described here.

1 John 1	John's audience (the "You")	Christians
3	They do not have fellowship (<i>koinonia</i>) with us as we have with God; they alienated from the life of God (Eph 4:18)	We have fellowship (<i>koinonia</i>) with Christ and all the members of His body (1 Cor 1:9, 1 Jn 1:7)
5	They need to hear the message that John has heard	We have heard and believed the message (Rom 10:17)
6	They walk in darkness	We walk in the light (Joh 8:12)
6	They lie and do not live by the truth	We have met the Truth and walk in the truth (Joh 14:6, 2 Jn 1:4)
7	They need to be purified from all sin	We have been purified from all sin (Heb 10:10)

8	They are deceived	We are filled with the Spirit of Truth (Jn 14:17)
9	They need to be purified from all unrighteousness	We have received the gift of forgiveness and have been made righteous (1 Cor 6:11, Eph 1:7)
10	They are calling God a liar	We agree with God (Rom 10:9-13)
10	God's word has no place in their lives	His word lives in us (1 Th 2:13)

Therefore, if repentance and faith leading to salvation only happens one time, why do Christians continue to talk about repentance? If we are not asking the Lord to wash away our sins, what are we doing? Repentance and belief still go hand in hand, even for the believer. Let me explain.

When I sin, what happens to me? Am I cast away from the Lord's presence? Do I lose my salvation? No, that is not possible. True believers are kept forever by the saving work of Christ. But what happens is similar to what happens to an unbeliever. When I sin, in some way I turn away from the Lord. Remember the comparison between Judas' sorrow and Peter's true repentance? Judas recognized his sin and was sorrowful, but he never turned toward God. He kept his face turned away from God.

FALSE Repentance	TRUE Repentance
Judas	Peter
Recognition of sin	Recognition of sin
Sorrow for sin (worldly grief)	Sorrow for sin (Godly grief)
Did not seek forgiveness (turn away from God)	Sought forgiveness (turn toward God)

For the believer, sin is turning away from God. It is moving away from God. You can't leave altogether but relationally speaking, you can move away. You can create distance in your relationship with the Lord. So why do we need to repent? Repentance is turning back toward God. You recognize your sin, you have sorrow for your sin and you turn yourself back toward God again. You turn away from the sin that pulled you away in the first place.

You repent but you also believe. The believer can still use 1 John 1:9 if it is understood correctly. Instead of seeing yourself as forgiven and cleaned again, which are unnecessary, you believe what Christ has already done for you. You thank him for his salvation which makes you secure in your relationship. You confess the sin and believe once again that you are his son, his daughter. Unbelievers repent and believe and believers do the same.

1 John 1:9--JUSTIFICATION

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9--SANCTIFICATION

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just **and has forgiven us our sins and has cleansed us from all unrighteousness.***

Unbelievers repent and believe and believers do the same.

This rhythm of repentance and faith is the engine for spiritual growth. It's also the first steps in revival. I've never seen a true revival up close and have only read about them. This past week I had a great visit with Eric Hesse, one of the missionaries that we support who serves in Berlin. Eric and his wife went to Wheaton College and they both experienced the revival that occurred there in 1995. No one can create a revival as they are a true work of God but simple repentance is the seed of all revivals. Listen to this description.

On Sunday evening, March 19, 1995, two students from Howard Payne University in Brownwood, Texas, spoke during a weekly student-led worship service at Wheaton. The two students "shared what God had done in their lives" during recent times of revival at their campus and at other schools, said Wheaton professor, Tim Beougher. After they spoke, there was no exhortation or manipulation, the professor said. "There was no attempt to try and force a repeat experience of what had happened at Howard Payne." But, "immediately students began to come up to the microphone and confess sin," Beougher said. "The confession was deep. It was painful. God really did a work of breaking people." The service had begun at 7:30 p.m. Sunday. It did not end until 6 a.m. Monday.¹

There was an earlier revival at Wheaton in 1950 that lasted 38 straight hours. Another witness of the 1995 revival summarized their thoughts.

Is this something that has been humanly contrived or manufactured? The personal sharing within the body of Christ here at Wheaton College has been spiritually sensitive and biblically grounded. The depth and breadth of the confession, repentance, and reconciliation point to a divine initiative. Every factor seems to confirm that we are experiencing an authentic work of the Sovereign Lord.²

It didn't even begin with repentance but rather a story about repentance at another school. We need this. Whether or not we ever see a larger revival, we all need personal revival. We all sinned this week. It may have been a careless word to someone or too many clicks of the mouse looking at things you should not see. We need to repent and believe.

Our relationships need this. Whenever there is true revival between us and the Lord it always spills out into repentance and reconciliation with one another. We probably all have hurts that need forgiveness granted to someone or else we need to repent of something we did to another person.

And the world needs this. The world sees us saying one thing and doing another. They see our hypocrisy better than we do at times. I guarantee that if they see you change your life, they will take notice. Let's pray and ask the Lord to grant us repentance.

Rich Maurer
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Repentance required for salvation

The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here (Matthew 12:41).

Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:14-15)

So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent (Mark 6:12)

“I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32)

I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. (Luke 13:3)

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance (Luke 15:7)

“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem (Luke 24:46-47)

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, (Acts 3:19)

And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.” (Acts 11:18)

how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:20-21)

but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. (Acts 26:20)

Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Romans 2:4)

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death (2 Corinthians 7:10)

God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will (2 Timothy 2:24-25)

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God (Hebrews 6:1).

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory (Revelation 16:9).

¹ https://www.cru.org/content/dam/cru/legacy/2012/02/Confession_and_Repentance.pdf

² <https://recollections.wheaton.edu/2013/03/when-god-moves/>