

# Moments *for* You

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Theme: Repentance



## REPENT! ABOUT WHAT?

Most readers are probably too young to remember the “mourner’s bench.” I did not grow up in a church that had one, but I knew friends who did. The mourners’ bench was simply a place to kneel at the front of the church where the sinner could weep over and confess his sins. Then, with a resolve to turn from those sins, he would receive Christ as his Savior. Mourning, turning, and believing met at the mourners’ bench.

No criticism of this practice is implied. Indeed, it would be a healthy thing to see more sorrow for sin today. But what does sorrow for sin or a resolve to turn from sin have to do with salvation? What is the place of repentance in relation to salvation? Must repentance precede faith? Is it a part of faith or a synonym for it? Can one be saved without repenting?

### WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

A number of scriptural terms have a basic, almost generic meaning that requires one to ask some questions in order to understand the exact meaning in a particular situation. For example, the word *salvation* means “to rescue or save.” But in some contexts salvation means a rescue from an earthly predicament, and in others it refers to being rescued from eternal damnation.

The same principle applies to the word *repentance*. In both the Old and New Testaments repentance means “a change of mind.” But the question must be asked, About what do you change your mind? A biblical call to repentance usually demands a new mindset toward God, ourselves, and our ways.

### NON-SAVING REPENTANCE

Repentance is not merely a superficial intellectual assent to something; it is a genuine shift which includes a resultant change, usually in actions. However, while people who reform have repented—changed their minds about their past lives—that kind of repentance, albeit genuine, does not of itself save them.

Many people connect repentance with sorrow so much that, for all practical purposes, sorrow becomes the definition of repentance. Sorrow may accompany a repentance, and the sense of sin may stir up a person’s mind or conscience so that he or she realizes the need for a Savior, but if there is no change of mind about Jesus Christ there will be no salvation.

### SAVING REPENTANCE

The clearest use of the word *repent* in the saving sense is found in Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38). Some in the crowd, hearing Peter’s plea to repent, may have wondered, *Repent about what?* If they listened closely—and if we recall what Peter’s sermon was all about—the answer to that question is clear.

The apostle first had spoken about Jesus of Nazareth: His life, His death, and His resurrection (Acts 2:22-24). Next, quoting from Psalm 16:8-11, Peter reminded his audience that Messiah would be raised from the dead (Acts 2:25-31).

Then the apostle made it extremely clear that Jesus of Nazareth, who had risen from the dead less than two months before in that very city, was Messiah. Furthermore, since David also predicted (in Psalm 110) that Messiah would ascend to the right hand of God as Jesus of Nazareth did,

then Jesus must be the Messiah.

In other words, Peter painted two pictures—one of Messiah from the Old Testament, and the other of Jesus of Nazareth. Now the inescapable conclusion: Jesus is “both Lord [God], and Christ [Messiah]” (Acts 2:36).

Upon hearing and realizing this, conviction overwhelmed the people. They asked what they should do, and Peter replied “Repent.” Repent about what? Change your minds about Jesus of Nazareth. Whatever you thought about Him before or whoever you thought He was, change your minds and now believe that He is God and your Messiah who died and who rose from the dead. *That* repentance saves.

Indeed, before any of us came to Christ we had some conception of Him. Perhaps it was fuzzy, perhaps it was reasonably clear, perhaps it was wrong. But we turned from whatever conception we had and turned to Him as our Savior from sin. And that repentance brought eternal salvation.

—Adapted from *So Great Salvation* by Charles C. Ryrie.

## REPENTANCE AND FAITH

*“Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:14,15).*

There are many passages in the New Testament which indicate that repentance is the key to salvation. For example, Paul said that he had preached everywhere that they “should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:20).

But he also preached that faith in Christ is the way to be saved. “Be-

lieve on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved’ (Acts 16:31). One could cite many verses stressing repentance and many that stress faith.

There is obviously no real conflict here, though if repentance is ignored there is a danger in what has been called “easy believism.” Mental assent to certain facts about Christ is not true saving faith. Nor would it produce salvation for a person merely to be sorry for his sins and change his behavior if he did not really trust from his heart in the person and work of Christ.

It is not “either/or” but “both/and.” One cannot truly repent (that is “change his mind” about Christ and His work, as well as his own life) without genuinely believing personally that Christ died for *his* sins and rose again to provide *his* salvation. Neither can one have genuine faith in Christ as Son of God and as his own *personal* Savior without having his whole life and attitude changed.

It is like two sides of the same coin—repentance on one side, faith on the other. We can only see one side at a time, but both are real and neither one of them can be there without the other. The real “formula” for salvation is “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). As Christ Himself preached: “Repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

—Henry M. Morris

*There can be no true conversion without conviction of sin. It is one thing to agree that I am a sinner: it is quite another thing to experience the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit in my life. Many have forgotten that the message is repentance toward God as well as faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

—William MacDonald

## SELF-JUDGMENT

*“They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mark 2:17).*

### THE NEED OF REPENTANCE

We are inclined to judge that there is a sad lack of depth and seriousness in much of our modern preaching. In our efforts to make the gospel simple, and salvation easy, we sometimes fail to press on the consciences of our hearers the holy claims of truth. Today, if a preacher were to call upon his hearers to “repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance,” he would, by many, be pronounced legal, ignorant, and so on. And yet this was precisely what the blessed apostle Paul did (Acts 26:20). Paul carried with him the full, clear, precious gospel of God—the gospel of grace—but Paul also preached repentance.

Man must take his true place before God, and that is the place of self-judgment. The Holy Ghost will make the sinner feel and own his real condition—it is He alone who can do so. He brings the Word of God to bear on man’s conscience. The Word is His hammer, with which He breaks the rock in pieces; it is His plow, which He uses to break up the uncultivated ground. He makes the furrow, and then casts in the incorruptible seed of the Gospel to germinate and bring forth fruit to the glory of God.

It is not that there is anything meritorious in the sinner’s repentance. Repentance is not a good work whereby the sinner merits the favor of God. True repentance is the discovery and hearty confession of our utter ruin and guilt. It is the finding out that my whole life has been a lie, and that I myself am a liar. This is serious work.

There is no flippancy or levity when a soul is brought to repentance

### THE JOY OF REPENTANCE

In Luke 15 we learn that every case of true repentance touches the heart of God: “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:10). It is one thing to see that repentance is required of man, but quite another to see that it is a joy to God. He has said, “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit” (Isaiah 57:15).

The scribes and Pharisees murmured because Jesus received sinners. How little they understood Him! How little they knew of themselves! It was the “lost” that Jesus came to seek and save (Luke 19:10). But the scribes and Pharisees—like many today—did not think themselves lost. They were thoroughly unbroken, unrepentant, self-confident. All the learning of the scribes, and all the righteousness of the Pharisees, could not awaken a single note of joy in the presence of the angels of God. Every man who is building upon his own righteousness, who talks of his duties, his doings, his sayings, his givings, is really insulting God.

But on the other hand, the man who comes with a broken heart, a contrite spirit, repentant, self-judged—that is the man who gives joy to the heart of God. And why? Simply because such a one feels his need of God. To understand this is to grasp the full truth of the great question of repentance. A God of love desires to make His way to the sinner’s heart, but there is no room for Him so long as that heart is hard and impenitent. But when the sinner is brought to the end of himself, when he sees himself a helpless, hopeless wreck; when like the prodigal he comes to himself and

feels the depth and reality of his need, then there is room in his heart for God, and—marvelous truth!—God delights to come and fill it.

### THE SINNER'S DUTY

What is the sinner's duty? "God ... now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30). God's commandment binds them to do it; His goodness leads them to it; His judgment warns them to it; and, above all, and most marvelous of all, He assures us that our repentance gives joy to His heart. No man can meet God on the basis of works or duty; but God can meet any man—even the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15)—on the ground of repentance, for that is man's true place.

How can we look at that accursed tree on which the Son of God bore the judgment of sin, or hear that solemn cry breaking forth from amid the shadows of Calvary, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" and not see the absolute necessity of repentance? Sin is so terrible, so absolutely hateful to God, so perfectly intolerable to His holy nature, that He had to bruise His well beloved and only begotten Son on the cross in order to put it away. Shall we hear the glad tidings of full and free forgiveness of sins—a forgiveness which cost nothing less than the unutterable horrors and agonies of the cross—and be unmoved? If it was absolutely necessary that Christ should suffer for our sins, is it not morally fitting that we should repent of them?

### THE BELIEVER'S PRACTICE

We must never forget the soul-subduing fact that the basis of our peace was laid in the indescribable sufferings of the Son of God. We avail ourselves of the death of Christ to save us from the consequences of our sins, but often our ways do not

exhibit the practical effect of that death in its application to ourselves. We do not walk as those who are dead with Christ—who have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts—who are delivered from this present evil world.

The apostle Paul called upon sinners to judge themselves, and he called upon believers to subdue and deny themselves. He did not preach a gospel that left people at ease in the world, satisfied with themselves, and occupied with earthly things. He did not tell people that they were saved from the flames of hell and were therefore free to enjoy the follies of earth. He preached a gospel which, while it fully met the sinner's deepest need, also most fully maintained God's glory—a gospel which, while it came down to the very lowest point of the sinner's condition, did not leave him there. Paul's gospel not only set forth a full, unconditional, forgiveness of sins, but also the believer's entire deliverance from this present evil world and from the present power and rule of sin through the death of Christ.

This is what every earnest spirit must crave. All true-hearted Christians must long for increased personal holiness, more likeness to Christ, more genuine devotedness of heart. May we all have grace to seek after these divine realities! May we diligently cultivate them in our own private life, and seek in every possible way to promote them in all those with whom we come in contact! Thus shall we in some measure stem the tide of hollow profession around us, and be a living testimony against the powerless form of godliness so sadly dominant in this our day.

—Condensed from "The Great Commission" by C.H. Mackintosh.

## CHURCH, REPENT!

The book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ fittingly closes the volume of Holy Scripture with a most urgent call to repentance. Four times we are told of men whom God had visited in grace and judgment who repented not (Revelation 9:20,21; 16:9,11).

The call to repent is also found seven times in the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3. The voice of the Lord comes to all of them, declaring, "I know thy works." Everything is open to His searching gaze. In these letters the Lord has given us a diagnosis of every condition in which His churches may be found. Because the spiritual state of a local church reflects that of its members, these messages should be carefully considered and applied by every believer.

### LABORING BUT LACKING LOVE

Ephesus is rebuked because of having left her first love. Mere doctrinal correctness is not enough to keep the Gospel light brightly burning. It is only as the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit that our words count with others. An inconsistent, un-Christlike church will cause the world to turn in scorn from its message. So the Lord calls for repentance.

Surely this call comes to many of us today, coupled with the warning that unless there be a new attitude, a turning back to the Lord in contrition and confession, He will take away the candlestick, and we shall be useless so far as witnessing for Him in a dark world is concerned

### WORLDLY AND PRACTICALLY UNSOUND

The condition of the Pergamos church is even worse. For there, positively evil things were tolerated and unholy alliances formed, which were

an affront to the One they professed to serve. Again comes the call to repent. He cannot tolerate unjudged iniquity in His professed people. To boast of salvation by grace while living in sin is detestable to Him. Could anything be more needed today than such a message as this?

### SUPERSTITIOUS AND IMMORAL

When we turn to consider the Thyatira church we are confronted with conditions so grave and wickedness so shocking that we might naturally hesitate to recognize it as a church of God at all. Are there not many such churches at the present time? How often have wealth and prominence protected wrongdoers and seemingly made it impossible to deal with them, lest whole families be disgraced or the church be actually disrupted. But desperate diseases require drastic treatment.

### COLD AND FORMAL

In the church in Sardis we see a very different condition prevailing. There, all is outwardly correct, but all is cold and formal. Yet it is evident there was a time when this church was aflame with passionate devotion to Christ. Oh, that in such former strongholds of active evangelism there might be a great turning to God, a repentance that would bring churches to their knees in brokenness of spirit. Only then will God open the windows of heaven and pour out life-giving showers to revive the barren wastes and give the world to see again a mighty movement of His Holy Spirit.

### RICH AND LUKEWARM

Laodicea is lukewarm. It is an easy state to fall into. The believer out of fellowship with God may be quite satisfied for a time, boasting of being rich and increased with goods and needing nothing. Yet all the while

the Lord detects the sad lack of practically everything that makes for vital godliness. He stands outside the door, knocking and seeking restoration of fellowship. The door is unlatched only by repentance. Oh, the shame of keeping Him outside the door!

Billy Sunday used to relate a story of a well-known atheist who was seen running to a burning church building intent on joining with others in subduing the flames. A neighbor observing him, exclaimed, "This is something new for you! I never saw you going to church before." The atheist replied, "Well, this is the first time I have ever seen a church on fire." Who can tell how many might be drawn to the people of God if they were only on fire for Christ and burning with zeal to win the lost?

—Condensed from *Except Ye Repent* by H. A. Ironside.

## BEFORE AND AFTER

### REPENTANCE TAKES YOU FROM...

- Crucifying Christ to being baptized in His name (*Acts 2:21-24,37-41*).
- Serving idols to serving God (*1 Thessalonians 1:9*).
- Reviling Jesus to revering Him (*Mark 15:32; Luke 23:39-43*).
- Feeding swine to returning to the father (*Luke 15:11-21*).
- Seeing the light to obeying the Lord (*Acts 9:1-6*).
- Being sorry to being saved (*2 Corinthians 7:10*).
- Being rebuked to being reconciled (*Luke 17:3,4*).
- Being captive to being free (*Deuteronomy 30:1-5*).
- Esteeming self to abhorring self (*Job 42:5,6*).
- Falling to overcoming (*Revelation 2:1-7*).

## SPACE TO REPENT

*"The Lord ... is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9).

The period of time when God deals with souls is called a "space to repent" in Revelation 2:21. Think of God's forbearance with Israel. After they turned their back on God again and again, the longsuffering of God came to an end "But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy" (2 Chronicles 36:16). "He gave her space to repent ... and she repented not."

But not so with the men of Nineveh. When judgment was pronounced upon them with only forty days of warning, the cry of God's prophet was heeded. They "believed God," and cried mightily unto Him (Jonah 3:5-9). God gave Nineveh "space to repent," and she repented.

Let us ask you, dear reader, have you yet been brought to true repentance, or are you filling up this long-suffering "space" of time with hardness and unbelief? If so, we would urge you to pause and solemnly consider how you stand with God.

God has graciously granted you this time to turn to Him and trust Jesus Christ as your Savior. The Lord said, "My spirit shall not always strive with man" (Genesis 6:3). May it never be said of you in the day of judgment, "I gave her [or him] space to repent ... and she [or he] repented not."

*"Seek ye the LORD while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near"* (Isaiah 55:6). *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"* (Acts 16:31).  
—Adapted

The repentance is more than just a mental game. Repentance is a decisive change in direction. It's a change of mind that leads to a change of thinking that leads to a change of attitude that leads to a change of feeling that leads to a change of values that leads to a change in the way you live.

—Ray Pritchard

Repentance is a change of mind of a very deep and practical character, which makes the man love what once he hated, and hate what once he loved.

—Charles Spurgeon

There is one case of death-bed repentance recorded—the penitent thief—that no one should despair; and only one, that no one should presume.

—Augustine

To repent is to adopt God's viewpoint in place of your own.

—William Temple

Repentance is the estimate a man forms of sin and of his own ways as a sinner through the light of God penetrating into his soul.

—J.N. Darby

Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement; he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realizing that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again ... is what Christians call repentance.

—C.S. Lewis

Regret is not repentance. Out of 10 men in the Bible who said, "I have sinned," only five actually repented. —H.A.B.

Repentance is not opposed to grace; it is the recognition of the need of grace.

—H.A. Ironside

Repentance is a lost note in our preaching and experience and the lack of it is filling our churches with baptized sinners who have never felt the guilt of sin or the need of a Savior.

—Vance Havner

Does "repent and believe the gospel" imply that the sinner must do two things to be saved, and not one only?

The exhortation is really only one requirement. The instruction, "Leave London and go to Los Angeles" sounds like a two-fold request, but it really is only one; it is impossible to go to Los Angeles without leaving London.

—J. Edwin Orr

Law and the fear of hell may startle into sorrow, and even lead to some kind of repentance. But it is the great power of Christ's love and sacrifice which will really melt the heart into true repentance.... I beseech you to put yourselves under the influence of that great love, and look on that Cross till your hearts melt.

—Alexander McLaren