

# REPENTANCE (#2)

## I. WHY PREACH ON REPENTANCE

1. We are making **repentance** the subject of our study this service. There are several reasons why we need to consider this subject. One or two may be mentioned.
2. In the first place, there is not any subject that needs to be discussed more than the subject of repentance.
  - a. In **Romans 3:23** Paul said, *“All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God.”*
  - b. Paul was speaking of the world as a whole– Jew and Gentiles.
  - c. And speaking of Christians, John said, *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1John 1:8).*
  - d. Inasmuch therefore as sin is universally prevalent it makes repentance universally necessary. If there has been a time in the history of our nation when we needed, as a nation to repent, it surely is now. Our immorality-rate has never been more alarmingly high than at present.
3. Another reason for preaching on repentance is that it is the most difficult thing in the world to persuade people to do.
  - a. I do not know any other thing that is laid upon people as a duty which they are so reluctant to do. It is not difficult, relatively speaking, to induce people to believe the Bible and to believe in the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.
  - b. And when people believe and repent it is not difficult to persuade them to be baptized. But it is a difficult matter to bring men and women to repentance.
  - c. A brief survey of Bible history will illustrate and confirm that statement.
4. We read in **2Peter 2:5** that *“Noah was a preacher of righteousness,”* and it seems likely that he may have preached 120 years. And if during that time he converted anybody other than members of his own family, they died before the flood came. Certainly his preaching did not persuade enough people to repent so as to prevent the coming of the flood.
5. In later times we find Jeremiah the weeping prophet pouring out his heart in moving appeals to his people in an effort to bring them to repentance. But every student of the Bible knows that the weeping prophet failed.

Some of the greatest preachers of the New Testament frequently failed.

- a. There was John the Baptist, a man sent from God, and the Lord himself said there was none greater born among women than he, and yet John sometimes failed.
  - 1) You remember on one occasion he preached to Antipas and Herodias. Antipas has married his brother Philip’s wife, but it was not a god-approved marriage and were living in adultery, and thus lost.
  - 2) John the Baptist very clearly said, “It is not lawful, Herod, for you to have your brother Philip’s wife.” [Mark 6:17] Did he move that guilty couple to

- repentance? He did not.
- 3) But rather Herodias was moved to bitterness; she had a relentless hatred for John. And when the opportunity came she was able to bring about the death of John the Baptist.
  - 4) John failed to bring that couple to repentance. He gave his life in the effort. But I think getting rid of the preacher is a poor substitute for repentance, is it not!
- b. And even when our Master preached with great power, reinforcing his message with a sinless life and many marvelous works, he sometimes failed to move people to repentance.
- 1) In **Matthew 11:20-24** we read, *“Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: 21 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. 23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. 24 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee”*
  - 2) Yes, even our Lord, failed to bring these villages and town along the Galilean lake to repentance.
- c. And the apostles Paul sometimes failed.
- 1) In **Acts 24** we read that in the presence of Felix *“he reasoned of righteousness and temperance and judgment to come,”* and Felix trembled beneath the onslaught, yet he did not repent.
  - 2) In **Acts 26** we read that Paul made his moving appeal to King Agrippa and while King Agrippa admitted that he was almost persuaded to be a Christian, yet he never repented.
6. Yes, it is a difficult matter to bring men to repentance. And yet it is such a necessary thing. The great men of the Bible have continued to preach that men should repent.
- a. When Jonah went to Nineveh he said, *“Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”* (**Jonah 3:4**). But those people repented and were saved.
  - b. When John the Baptist began his mission we read that we went forth and preached saying, *“Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* (**Matthew 3:2**) And while Antipas and Herodias didn’t repent, much of Jerusalem and Judah came to John to be baptized.
  - c. When our Lord left Nazareth and came down to Capernaum and beginning his

- public ministry, he preached that men should repent.
- d. Later, when the seventy and the twelve went out preaching, they preached “repentance.”
7. And Jesus emphasized the importance of repentance. In **Luke 13 and verse 1-5:**
    - a. Our master emphasized the warning, that *“Except ye repent, ye shall in like manner perish.”*
    - b. In **Luke 24:47** she said that *“repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”*
    - c. And on Pentecost we find Peter preached repentance to the men whose hand had been dipped in the blood of our Lord. (**Acts 2:38**)
    - d. And when Paul was making his great speech on Mars Hill, among others things he said, *“The time of ignorance therefore God overlooked, but now he commandeth that they should all men everywhere repent”* (**Acts 17:30**).
    - e. Repentance, then, has been laid upon every man who would be saved as an inescapable responsibility. Everyone who wants to be saved from his sins, whether he be alien sinner or a backsliding saint, must turn to God in repentance.

## II. WHAT REPENTANCE IS NOT

Since it is necessary that we repent, it is important that we know what repentance is. There is a great deal of popular misunderstanding concerning the nature of repentance.

1. Sometimes you will ask a person, “What is repentance?” and he will say that repentance is “sorrow.”
  - a. It is true that repentance involves sorrow but there can be sorrow without repentance.
  - b. I’ve already referred to the case of Herod Antipas and Herodias. You remember that on Herod’s birthday that Herodias’ daughter, Salome, danced before Herod. It must have been a lascivious, obscene performance.
  - c. And old Antipas was so captivated, so carried-away that we might say he lost his head— but not in the sense that John the Baptist lost his, however. He said that he would give her anything she asked for, even to the half of his kingdom.
  - d. And she did what is ordinarily a wise thing for a daughter to do, she sought her mother’s advice. But it is always tragic when a daughter has such a poor excuse for a mother as Salome had. When she asked for advice Herodias said in substance, “You tell Herod to give you the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” She would stop that preacher; she did not like his message.
  - e. And when Herod heard the request of Salome he was sorry. Yes, he was *“exceedingly sorry”* one writer said (**Mark 6:26**), but that **was not repentance**. He went right on and had John the Baptist beheaded.
2. Another suggests that repentance is sorrow along with confession. But, no, that is not

repentance.

- a. In **Matthew 27** we read that Judas, when he saw Jesus was condemned, was sorry. His heart was swept with *remorse*, for such is the meaning of the word in the Greek word in that verse. [See NASB, Matt 27:3.]
  - b. He brought back his ill gotten money and he said, ***“I have betrayed innocent blood.”*** Of all the men who sinned against our Lord during the time of his trial and crucifixion, Judas perhaps sinned more knowingly than any other, and yet he was not as bad as he might have been.
  - c. He might have kept his blood money. Some men would do that. He might have kept his mouth shut, but he did not. He brought back the money, confessed his wrong saying, ***“I have betrayed innocent blood.”***
  - d. Yes, there was remorse, and there was confession, but there was not true repentance as the Bible commands.
3. And then again, someone tells us that repentance is godly sorry. Well, godly sorrow is related to repentance.
- a. In **2 Corinthians 7:10**, we read that ***“godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, a repentance which bringeth no regret; but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”*** Godly sorrow is not repentance; godly sorrow works repentance.
  - b. The potter works with clay and fashions a vessel; the potter is not the vessel, he is the producer of the vessel.
  - c. Godly sorrow is not repentance; it proceeds repentance and produces it just as cause proceeds effect.
4. And still another suggests that repentance is restitution and reformation of life.
- a. First, let me explain the meaning of the word “restitution”; it is making right some wrongs; an example would be returning stolen property to the rightful owner, etc.
  - b. Restitution and reformation of life are related to repentance, but they do not produce repentance. Godly sorrow precedes and produces repentance; restitution and reformation follow repentance. They are the effects of repentance.
  - c. You remember when John the Baptist was talking to the people who came to his preaching, he said, ***“Bring therefore fruits worthy of repentance.”*** (**Matt. 3:8**).
    - 1) In other words, he said, “Let your conduct, your reformation of life be evidence of your repentance.” If a man claims to be penitent and still goes ahead in the same sins he has committed prior to the time he claims to have repented, then we know his repentance is not genuine because repentance involves reformation of life.
    - 2) If a man has been lying and repents, he quits lying; if he has been stealing and repents, he doesn’t steal any more.
  - d. Restitution also is a product or an effect of repentance.
    - 1) You remember when the Philippian jailor heard the preaching of Paul and Silas and believed it he took them the same hour of the night and washed

- their stripes.
- 2) He couldn't undo the beating; he could not make restitution to the extent that those men be instantly healed; he could not make restitution in that he could not make it as if those men had never been beaten. But he could wash their stripes and make them more comfortable and do something to hasten their recovery.
  - 3) He was making restitution as far as he could. He was bring forth fruit worthy of repentance.
  - 4) We like the statement of Zacchaeus who said, "*If I have wrongfully exacted ought of any man, I restore fourfold.*" [Luke 19:8]
- e. These- reformation and restitution– are not in and of themselves repentance.

### III. WHAT REPENTANCE IS!

We have found what proceeds repentance– godly sorrow; we have found what follows repentance– reformation of life and restitution; but what IS repentance?

1. In **Matthew 12:41** Jesus said the men of Nineveh **repented** at the preaching of Jonah. What did the men of Nineveh do?
  - a. We turn back to the third chapter of Jonah and read that Jonah began preaching that in forty days Nineveh would be destroyed. And in **v.5** we read that they believed the preaching of Jonah. Well, that was not repentance, that was FAITH.
  - b. And then we read (in **v. 8**) that they **turned every man from his evil works** and the same verse says that they "**cried mightily unto God..**" Friends, here we see repentance; and we see repentance expressing itself in a change in the manner of living.
  - c. That was turning from that which was wrong, to God!
2. In **1Thess. 1:9** we find a description of the repentance of the Thessalonians at the preaching of Paul, "**ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.**"
3. In **Acts 20:21** we read that Paul had preached "**repentance toward God.**"
  - a. Repentance is turning from that which is wrong to that which is right, a turning from Satan to God.
4. The word "**repentance**" literally means a change of mind which results in a change of conduct.
  - a. When a man's mind is changed his thinking is changed.
  - b. When a man's mind is changed his emotions are changed. After the change he may love that which once he hated and hate that which once he loved.
  - c. And in the third place, a man's volition, or will [what he wants and plans to do], is changed in repentance.
    - 1) We have a good illustration of that in the **21<sup>st</sup> chapter of Matthew.** A

man had two sons. He came to the first and said, “*Go work today in the vineyard,*” and He said, “*I will not.*” (**Matt. 21:28-31.**)

- 2) That has a modernistic ring, does it not? Sounds like a lot of children today! But later, this son repented and went. Now before repented he was in the attitude of saying, “*I will not,*” after he repented he was in the attitude of saying, “*I will.*”
- 3) That shows how he changed his mind. A change in thinking, a change in emotional activity or attitude, a change in will.

#### IV. HOW ARE MEN MOVED TO REPENT?

How are men moved to repent? How do we come into possession of repentance?

1. Sometimes people tell us that God gives repentance. Well, in a sense that is true.
  - a. In **Acts 11:18** we read, after Peter had rehearsed to his brethren what took place at the household of Cornelius, telling them about the coming of the Holy Spirit, that they held their peace and said then that God “*granted*” also to the Gentiles repentance unto life— “granted also”, in like manner, or in addition to the Jews.
  - b. But the Jews were commanded to repent! Yet, it is said that God granted repentance unto life.
2. In what sense did God grant repentance. In two senses!
  - a. In the first place he granted repentance in that he gave the privilege of repenting, and that is a marvelous blessing, that is a wonderful provision of grace that God grants to us the privilege of repenting.
  - b. That is more than he has done for the fallen angels. “**God spared not angels when they sinned but cast them down to hell [to Tartarus] and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.**” [**2Peter 2:4**]
  - c. He did not grant them the privilege of repenting. I don’t know why. Was it because of their superior nature? Was it because of their greater opportunity? Was it because they sinned without a tempter. I do not know. But God has not granted to angels the privilege of repenting. God has granted to man that privilege.
  - d. And God grants to the Gentiles the privilege of repenting as he did to the Jews.
3. In the second place, God grants repentance in the sense that he gives the motives that move men to repentance. I briefly mention two or three of these motives.
  - a. In the first place, there is the motive of fear. “**Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.**” (**Jonah 3:4**)
    - 1) “**Now God commands all men everywhere to repent, inasmuch as he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he had ordained.**” (**Acts 17:31**)
    - 2) “**Repent or perish**” (**Luke 13:3**) These scriptures emphasize the fear of

- punishment.
- b. In the second place, there is the hope of reward.
    - 1) ***“Repent ye, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38).***
    - 2) ***“Repent and turn, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.” (Acts 3:19).***
  - c. And then in the third place, Paul said in **Romans 2:4**, ***“Despiseth thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”***
    - 1) When a man pauses to think about how good God has been to him, it should be enough to move him to repentance.
    - 2) When he remembers that God created him, that God so loved him that he gave his Son to die for him, that God is the one in whom he lives and moves and has his being, that God is the one from whom he received every good and every perfect gift– I say it is enough to move him to repentance.
    - 3) Yes, the goodness of God leads men to repentance.
  - d. And finally, I make mention of the fact that the repentance of man causes joy among the angels.
    - 1) We read that the joy among the angels over one sinner that repents is more than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance. [Luke 15:10]
    - 2) To bring joy to others, your family, the church, even to the angels, and to heaven above – this is a worthy motive of repentance.

## CONCLUSION

1. Repentance is not something that involves a long period of time. In **Luke 17:4** Jesus said that if a man sins against you seven times in a day and turns and repents seven times, forgive him.
  - a. That shows that a man can practice forgiveness at least seven times in one day. If we repent, God will forgive. And it doesn't take a long period of time.
  - b. The Philippian jailor heard the Gospel, believed it, repented of his sins and was baptized all the same hour of the night. Repentance is not something that involves a long period of time.
2. I'm wondering if there are those present today who need to repent? Either as an alien sinner outside of Christ who needs to repent to come to the Lord in obedience, or as a backsliding believer.
  - a. The Ninevites were promised forty days in which to repent. But my sinner friend, my prodigal brother, you do not have the assurance of forty minutes, not even

forty seconds.

- b. If there are those where answerable to the gospel invitation, we urge upon you the importance of coming now. Today is the day of salvation, now is the accepted time.

[For source material see J.W. McGarvey's "Sermons" and B.C. Goodpasture's radio sermon, March 20, 1966, #507, over a Nashville radio station.]