

The Christian Lifestyle of Repentance

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Mark 1:14-15 "...Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." NASB

Here we see the Lord Jesus travelling around the country of Galilee at the beginning of his ministry calling on the people to repent. This study focusses on what repentance is and the need of it in the christian life.

After some time spent in training his twelve chosen disciples Jesus sent them out in pairs to preach the same message that he preached, that is a call to repentance. It's interesting that the method that Jesus considered as the best method of evangelism was to combine the preaching of the gospel with medical missionary work.

Mark 6:7;12-13 "Jesus called the twelve and began to send them out two by two. He gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ...12 So they went out and preached that all should repent. 13 They cast out many demons and anointed many sick people with olive oil and healed them." NET

Jesus gave the twelve a supernatural authority over demons and over genuine illnesses. This caused quite a stir among the people so that they would listen to the message that the disciples preached. So what is this repentance that featured so predominantly in the message of Jesus?

Definition of Repentance. (Greek - "Metanoia" word number 3341) To change your mind from evil to good. Spiros Zodhiates, Th.D. *The Complete Wordstudy Dictionary New Testament.* AMG Publishers. Chattanooga, TN 37422 USA.1993.

According to the Greek dictionary the word "Metanoia" translated "repentance" means to have your mind changed. This change of mind is from one that rejects God and his law to a mind that embraces God and accepts God's law.

John The Baptist. A preacher of Repentance.

Before Jesus began his public ministry his cousin John the Baptist began a six month ministry to prepare the way for the appearance of Jesus. This ministry consisted of three months of preaching a call to repentance and baptism and another three months languishing in prison where he was eventually executed by Herod.

Luke 3:2-3 "...the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the region around the Jordan River, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." NET

Matthew 3:4 "Now John wore clothing made from camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his diet consisted of locusts and wild honey. 5 Then people from Jerusalem, as well as all Judea and all the region around the Jordan, were going out to him, 6 and he was baptizing them in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins.7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You offspring of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Therefore produce fruit that proves your repentance, 9 and don't think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones! 10 Even now the ax is laid at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.11 "I baptize you with water, for repentance, but the one coming after me is more powerful than I am—I am not worthy to carry his sandals! He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clean out his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the storehouse, but the chaff he will burn up with inextinguishable fire!" NET

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Luke 3:7-9 “So John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You offspring of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? **8** Therefore produce fruit that proves your repentance, and don’t begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones! **9** Even now the ax is laid at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” NET

After Jesus is baptised by John he begins his three and a half year ministry doing medical missionary work, preaching about repentance and about the kingdom of God. Those people who repented of their sins were told that those sins would be forgiven by God. It was then necessary for that person who was under the control of the spirit of God to show evidence of that repentance by a new lifestyle.

Matthew-Levi who was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus was also a very wealthy tax collector. He gave a big reception at his house and a great crowd was there. He did not hide the fact that he was a follower of Jesus. When the pharisees and scribes saw the disciples of Jesus eating food with tax collectors and a poor class of people that were known as “sinners”, these holier than thou bigots grumbled that Jesus' disciples ate with them.

Luke 5:30-32 “But the Pharisees and their experts in the law complained to his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” **31** Jesus answered them, “Those who are well don’t need a physician, but those who are sick do. **32** I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” NET

Jesus emphasised that his mission was to call all people to repentance. Only those who feel the need and who know that they are sinners will heed the call. Those who like the pharisees are sick but do not know it will not feel the need to respond to the offer of salvation.

Sometime later Jesus was preaching to the crowds of thousands of people who followed him.

Luke 13:1-9 “Now there were some present on that occasion who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. **2** He answered them, “Do you think these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered these things? **3** No, I tell you! But unless you repent, you will all perish as well! **4** Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower in Siloam fell on them, do you think they were worse offenders than all the others who live in Jerusalem? **5** No, I tell you! But unless you repent you will all perish as well!” **6** Then Jesus told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. **7** So he said to the worker who tended the vineyard, ‘For three years now, I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and each time I inspect it I find none. Cut it down! Why should it continue to deplete the soil?’ **8** But the worker answered him, ‘Sir, leave it alone this year too, until I dig around it and put fertilizer on it. **9** Then if it bears fruit next year, very well, but if not, you can cut it down.’” NET

Here Jesus is highlighting the importance of repentance. That we have one of two choices. That we can repent or we can perish. We live in a world that is falling apart physically and socially. People are killed in accidents, die of disease, die in wars, and are murdered. This does not mean that these unfortunate people were worse sinners than the rest of humanity. But Jesus is saying that no matter who we are we will all perish unless we repent.

This repentance/change of mind is a life changing event that manifests itself in changes of thoughts, opinions and actions. A mental accent to the truth of the gospel is not enough and does not constitute genuine repentance. The fruit of repentance is to obey God and have a godlike character.

How do we repent? How do we obtain this transformation of mind?

Jeremiah 13:23 “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, Or the leopard his spots?
Then you as well can do good Who are accustomed to doing evil.” NASB

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Clearly all humanity is accustomed to do evil and cannot repent on its own accord. We can no more change our evil behaviour than a leopard can change his spots. To change we must first seek the Lord. This seeking is itself an evidence that the Holy Spirit is working on our hearts. Then the Holy Spirit will slowly transform our minds and actions.

Isaiah 55:6-7 “Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.⁷ Let the wicked abandon his way, And the unrighteous person his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.” NASB

Here we see the concept of repentance and forgiveness of sin was taught in the Old Testament by the prophet Isaiah. Repentance comes before forgiveness and is manifested in a change in behaviour and thoughts. The Holy Spirit has to work on a persons mind to change his thoughts and behaviour. Then the promise from God is that He will abundantly pardon. Remove all record of our sin so that we will be granted eternal life.

After the resurrection of Jesus from his grave he met with the disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem. He began to explain to them what the Old Testament scriptures had said concerning himself. He then repeated his mission to them to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all the world.

Luke 24:46-47 “and said to them, “Thus it stands written that the Christ would suffer and would rise from the dead on the third day, **47** and repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” NET

On the day of Pentecost which was fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus the apostle Peter is preaching to the large crowd gathered in Jerusalem for the annual festival. He told them that the wicked leaders of the nation had just murdered the Messiah. For centuries the Jewish nation had been waiting for the appearance of the promised Messiah only to now find out that he had arrived, had been murdered, raised from the dead, and returned to heaven. Now Jerusalem would be the starting point for the Christian church and that repentance to obtain forgiveness would be preached to the whole world in his name.

Acts 2:37-38 “Now when they heard this, they were acutely distressed and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “What should we do, brothers?” **38** Peter said to them, “Repent, and each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” NET

We can only imagine the fear that came over the crowd as they realised what they had done. They were acutely distressed. This indicates that they had a change of mind about the way they thought of Jesus and regretted their actions in killing him. They now refer to the apostles as 'brethren' and ask what shall we do. The apostle Peter answers them with the gospel. He tells them to repent and be baptised for the forgiveness of sins and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Later on Peter and John were going to the Jerusalem temple at 9am, the time of the hour of prayer. Recorded here is Peter's second sermon to the crowd. He tells the people that they had murdered the prince of life and that God has raised him from the dead.

Acts 3:17-20 “And now, brothers, I know you acted in ignorance, as your rulers did too. **18** But the things God foretold long ago through all the prophets—that his Christ would suffer—he has fulfilled in this way. **19** Therefore repent and turn back so that your sins may be wiped out, **20** so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and so that he may send the Messiah appointed for you—that is, Jesus. NET

Peter again preaches the gospel of repentance that is necessary for the forgiveness of sins. He also inspires them with the hope of the return of Jesus and that God's ultimate will is to be accomplished.

So great was the jealousy of the Jewish leaders towards the apostles Peter and John that they had them arrested and brought before the council. They were given strict instructions not to preach anymore in the name of Jesus. Peter and John ignored this warning and continued to teach in the name of Jesus. This caused all the apostles to be arrested this time.

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Acts 5:27-32 “When they had brought them, they stood them before the council, and the high priest questioned them, **28** saying, “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood on us!” **29** But Peter and the apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than people. **30** The God of our forefathers raised up Jesus, whom you seized and killed by hanging him on a tree. **31** God exalted him to his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. **32** And we are witnesses of these events, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.” NET

Here it is clearly said that Jesus gives repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. We do not repent first then come to Jesus. We are to come to Christ first, just as we are, then the Holy Spirit will transform our minds to repentance. The repentant sinner becomes a person who chooses to obey God. The expression 'hung on a tree' was an idiom for crucifixion. It was this crucifixion that bought the gift of repentance for our fallen race. Now we must obey God rather than men. When the will of God conflicts with the will of man in that instance the will of God must be done.

Many years later the apostle Paul is preaching to the philosophers of Athens in ancient Greece. He is in the Areopagus which in Paul's day had become a centre for discussions on religion and morals.

Acts 17:22;29-31 “So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, men of Athens, I see that you are very religious in all respects...So since we are God’s offspring, we should not think the deity is like gold or silver or stone, an image made by human skill and imagination. **30** Therefore, although God has overlooked such times of ignorance, he now commands all people everywhere to repent. **31** because he has set a day on which he is going to judge the world in righteousness, by a man whom he designated, having provided proof to everyone by raising him from the dead.” NET

Paul is attempting to persuade the Greeks to turn away from false gods of human philosophy, and gods made from gold, silver or stone. Now that the gospel is going all around the world the true God is now declaring that all men should repent of the worship of false gods and turn to the Living God. This God has fixed a certain day in which he will judge the world through Jesus Christ.

Later after leaving Greece Paul steps off on the Island of Malta on a journey to Jerusalem. While there he contacts the elders at the church at Ephesus and asks them to come to him. When they finally arrive in Malta he greets them and gives them a farewell speech as he believes that he will never see them again. Luke records his speech some of which is mentioned below.

Acts 20:18-21 “When they arrived, he said to them, “You yourselves know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I set foot in the province of Asia, **19** serving the Lord with all humility and with tears, and with the trials that happened to me because of the plots of the Jews. **20** You know that I did not hold back from proclaiming to you anything that would be helpful, and from teaching you publicly and from house to house. **21** testifying to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus.” NET

Here Paul tells the ephesian elders for the sake of posterity that his gospel was one of repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance – a transformed mind that obeys God and renounces sin. Faith – acting on the promises of God, also believing and doing what Jesus Christ tells us.

After arriving at Jerusalem Paul is arrested. And so began a long process of imprisonment and a journey that lead him to the city of Rome to stand before Caesar. Paul became imprisoned in the city of Caesarea between the yrs 57-59 AD. This city was the capitol of the Roman province of Judea and while he was in prison in Caesarea he was called to give his defence in the presence of the 32 yr old King Agrippa. History records this man as being Herod Agrippa II (27-93_{AD}) who ruled over territory north and north-east of the sea of Galilee. [1] Paul describes to the King his former life as a devout Jew and of his acceptance of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. He describes how he was given a vision from Jesus while he was on the road to Damascus to persecute Christians.

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Acts 26:19-20 “Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, **20** but I declared to those in Damascus first, and then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds consistent with repentance.” NET

Paul attempts to persuade the King to become a Christian. He emphasises the fact that repentance is made manifest by the performance of deeds and behaviour that clearly indicate a change of mind. No repentance is genuine without a corresponding change in behaviour.

In his letter to the Christian church at Rome Paul talks about condemnation and repentance.

Romans 2:4-11 “...do not know that God’s kindness leads you to repentance? **5** But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourselves in the day of wrath, when God’s righteous judgment is revealed! **6** He will reward each one according to his works: **7** eternal life to those who by perseverance in good works seek glory and honor and immortality, **8** but wrath and anger to those who live in selfish ambition and do not obey the truth but follow unrighteousness. **9** There will be affliction and distress on everyone who does evil, on the Jew first and also the Greek, **10** but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, for the Jew first and also the Greek. **11** For there is no partiality with God.” NET

Here Paul talks about how it is the kindness of God that leads us to repentance. If we desire to escape the destructive judgement of God the only way is to repent. So God in his mercy gives us his spirit to lead us to repentance. If we choose not to repent then we condemn ourselves. In the judgement God will reward each person according to what they have done in this life. Those people who are stubborn and have an unrepentant heart and are evil are storing up wrath for themselves on the day of judgement. While those people who are genuinely repentant and show it by persevering in doing good works indicate that they are seeking glory and honor and immortality, eternal life.

Romans 12:1-2 “Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—alive, holy, and pleasing to God—which is your reasonable service. **2** Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God—what is good and well-pleasing and perfect.” NET

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. This is the repentance that leads to eternal life and is what God desires all people to do. This transformation can only be accomplished by the Spirit of God. God desires that all humanity be saved to eternal life.

2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some regard slowness, but is being patient toward you, because he does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” NET

Deliverance from Bondage

Romans 8:1-8 “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. **2** For the law of the life-giving Spirit in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. **3** For God achieved what the law could not do because it was weakened through the flesh. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and concerning sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, **4** so that the righteous requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. **5** For those who live according to the flesh have their outlook shaped by the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their outlook shaped by the things of the Spirit. **6** For the outlook of the flesh is death, but the outlook of the Spirit is life and peace, **7** because the outlook of the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to the law of God, nor is it able to do so. **8** Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. NET

Repentance

Those who are “in Christ” have been freed from the condemnation of the law of God. Being free from the law of sin and death means that Christ has taken away the laws power to condemn. The Christian who lives by the Spirit of God will have a battle that will never cease in this life. That battle is between the 'flesh' and the 'Spirit'. The flesh is our sinful human nature and the Spirit is the Spirit of God. These two are in a war to gain control of our minds. If my sinful human nature controls my mind then I am *'in the flesh'* and have what is called a carnal mind. If I live a life of repentance then I am *'in christ'* and the Spirit of God controls my mind therefore I have a spiritual mind. Note that Paul says that the mind controlled by the flesh is hostile to God and refuses to be subject to the law of God. Such a person cannot live a life pleasing to God.

A Life Pleasing to God

1 Thess 4:1-8 “Finally then, brothers and sisters, we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received instruction from us about how you must live and please God (as you are in fact living) that you do so more and more. **2** For you know what commands we gave you through the Lord Jesus. **3** For this is God’s will: that you become holy, that you keep away from sexual immorality, **4** that each of you know how to possess his own body in holiness and honor, **5** not in lustful passion like the Gentiles who do not know God. **6** In this matter no one should violate the rights of his brother or take advantage of him, because the Lord is the avenger in all these cases, as we also told you earlier and warned you solemnly. **7** For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness. **8** Consequently the one who rejects this is not rejecting human authority but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. NET

Conclusion:

1. We must come to Jesus as we are to receive the gift of repentance to eternal life.
2. Repentance is a transformation of mind that is a result of the indwelling Holy Spirit.
3. Repentance is a lifestyle that maintains a transformed mind. It is not just a one off event.
4. Without repentance we will all be condemned in the Judgement.
5. Repentance towards God is demonstrated by obedience to the law of God. It is accompanied by actions and behaviour that are an evidence of a mind that is conformed to the will of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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<http://www.britannica.com/place/Caesarea> [1] <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Herod-Agrippa-II>