

Beacon Bible Church  
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## THE DOCTRINE OF REPENTANCE IN RELATIONSHIP TO SALVATION

Repentance is the trans. of a Gr. word (metanoia) meaning, "to have another mind," "to change the mind," and is used in the N. T. to indicate a change of mind in respect of sin, of God, and of self. This change of mind may, especially in the case of Christians who have fallen into sin, be preceded by sorrow (2 Cor. 7. 8-11), but sorrow for sin, though it may "work" repentance, is not repentance. The son in Mt. 21:28, 29 illustrates true repentance. Saving faith (Heb. 11:39, note) includes and implies that change of mind which is called repentance.

The following is taken from "Systematic Theology" by Lewis Sperry Chafer, D.D., Litt. D., TH. D. He was an understudy of Dr. C. I. Scofield and founder of Dallas Theological Seminary.

1. The Meaning of the Word. The word metanoia is in every instance translated repentance. The word means a change of mind. The common practice of reading into this word the thought of sorrow and heart-anguish is responsible for much confusion in the field of Soteriology. There is no reason why sorrow should not accompany repentance or lead on to repentance, but the sorrow, whatever it may be, is not repentance. In 2 Corinthians 7:10, it is said that "godly sorrow worketh repentance," that is, it leads on to repentance; but the sorrow is not to be mistaken for the change of mind which it may serve to produce. The son cited by Christ as reported in Matthew 21:28-29 who first said "i will not go," and afterward repented and went, is a true example of the precise meaning of the word. The New Testament call to repentance is not an urge to self-condemnation, but is a call to a change of mind which promotes a change in the course being pursued. This definition of this word as it is used in the New Testament is fundamental. Little or no progress can be made in a right induction of the Word of God on this theme, unless the true and accurate meaning of the word is discovered and defended throughout.

2. The Relation of Repentance to Believing. Too often, when it is asserted - as it is here - that repentance is not to be added to belief as a separate requirement for salvation, it is assumed that by so much the claim has been set up that repentance is not necessary to salvation. Therefore, it is as dogmatically stated as language can declare, that repentance is essential to salvation and that none could be saved apart from repentance, but, it is included in believing and could not be separated from it. The discussion is restricted at this point to the problem which the salvation of unregenerate persons develops; and it is safe to say that few errors have caused so much hindrance to the salvation of the lost than the practice of demanding of them an anguish of soul before faith in Christ can be exercised. Since such emotions cannot be produced at will, the way of salvation has thus been made impossible for all who do not experience the required anguish. This error results in another serious misdirection of the unsaved, namely, one in which they are encouraged to look inward at themselves and not away to Christ as Savior. Salvation is made to be conditioned on feelings and not on faith. Likewise, people are led by this error to measure the validity of their salvation by the intensity of anguish which preceded or accompanied it. It is in this manner that sorrow of heart becomes a most subtle form of meritorious work and to that extent a contradiction of grace. Underlying all this supposition that tears and anguish are necessary is the most serious notion that God is not propitious, but that He must be softened to pity by penitent grief.



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The Bible declares that God is propitious because of Christ's death for the very sin which causes human sorrow. There is no occasion to melt or temper the heart of God. His attitude toward sin and the sinner is a matter of revelation. To imply, as preachers have done so generally, that God must be mollified and lenified by human agony is a desperate form of unbelief. The unsaved have a gospel of good news to believe, which certainly is not the mere notion that God must be coaxed into a saving attitude of mind; it is that Christ has died and grace is extended from One who is propitious to the point of infinity. The human heart is prone to imagine that there is some form of atonement for sin through being sorry for it. Whatever may be the place of sorrow for sin in the restoration of a Christian who has transgressed, it cannot be determined with too much emphasis that for the unsaved - Jew or Gentile - there is no occasion to propitiate God or to provide any form of satisfaction by misery or distress of soul. With glaring inconsistency, those who have preached that the unsaved must experience mental suffering before they can be saved, have completely failed to inform their hearers about how such required torture may be secured. It should be restated that, since genuine grief of mind cannot be produced at will and since many natures are void of depression of spirit, to demand that a self-produced affliction of mind shall precede salvation by faith becomes a form of fatalism and is responsible for having driven uncounted multitudes to despair. However, it is true that, from the Arminian point of view, no greater heresy could be advanced than this contention that the supposed merit of human suffering because of personal sins should be excluded from the terms on which a soul may be saved.

As before stated, repentance, which is a change of mind, is included in believing. No individual can turn to Christ from some other confidence without a change of mind, and that, it should be noted, is all the repentance a spiritually dead individual can ever effect. That change of mind is the work of the Spirit (Eph. 2:8). It will be considered, too, by those who are amenable to the Word of God, that the essential preparation of heart which the Holy Spirit accomplishes in the unsaved to prepare them for an intelligent and voluntary acceptance of Christ as Savior - as defined in John 16:8-11 - is not a sorrow for sin. The unsaved who come under this divine influence are illuminated - given a clear understanding - concerning but one sin, namely, that "they believe not on me."

To believe on Christ is one act, regardless of the manifold results which it secures. It is not turning from something to something; but rather turning to something from something. If this terminology seems a mere play on words, it will be discovered, by more careful investigation, that this is a vital distinction. To turn from evil may easily be a complete act in itself, since the action can be terminated at that point. To turn to Christ is a solitary act, also, and the joining of these two separate acts corresponds to the notion that two acts - repentance and faith - are required for salvation. On the other hand, turning to Christ from all other confidences is one act, and in that one act repentance, which is a change of mind, is included. The Apostle stresses this distinction in accurate terms when he says to the Thessalonians, "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (I Thess. 1:9). This text provides no comfort for those who contend that people must first, in real contrition, turn from idols - which might terminate at that point - and afterwards, as a second and separate act, turn to God. The text recognizes but one act - "Ye turned to God from idols" - and that is an act of faith alone.



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Those who stress repentance as a second requirement along with believing, inadvertently disclose that, in their conception, the problem of personal sin is all that enters into salvation. The sin nature must also be dealt with; yet that is not a legitimate subject of repentance. Salvation contemplates many vast issues and the adjustment of the issue of personal sin, though included, is but a small portion of the whole. Acts 26:18, sometimes drafted in proof of the idea that the unsaved must do various things in order to be saved, rather enumerates various things which are wrought for him in the saving power of God.

### 3. The Absence of the Demand for Repentance From Salvation Scriptures.

Upwards of 115 New Testament passages condition salvation on believing, and fully 35 passages condition salvation on faith, which latter word in this use of it is an exact synonym of the former. These portions of Scripture, totaling about 150 in all, include practically all that the New Testament declares on the matter of the human responsibility in salvation; yet each one of these texts omits any reference to repentance as a separate act. This fact, easily verified, cannot but bear enormous weight with any candid mind. In like manner, the Gospel by John, which is written to present Christ as the object of faith unto eternal life, does not once employ the word repentance. Similarly, the Epistle to the Romans, which is the complete analysis of all that enters into the whole plan of salvation by grace, does not use the word repentance in connection with the saving of a soul, except in 2:4 where repentance is equivalent to salvation itself. When the Apostle Paul and his companion, Silas, made reply to the jailer concerning what he should do to be saved, they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). This reply, it is evident, fails to recognize the necessity of repentance in addition to believing. From this overwhelming mass of irrefutable evidence, it is clear that the New Testament does not impose repentance upon the unsaved as a condition of salvation. The Gospel by John with its direct words from the lips of Christ, the Epistle to the Romans with its exhaustive treatment of the theme in question, the Apostle Paul, and the whole array of 150 New Testament passages which are the total of the divine instruction, are incomplete and misleading if repentance must be accorded a place separate from, and independent of, believing. No thoughtful person would attempt to defend such a notion against such odds, and those who have thus undertaken doubtless have done so without weighing the evidence or considering the untenable position which they assume.

4. The Significance of Repentance in Specific Passages. When entering upon this phase of this study, it is first necessary to eliminate all portions of the New Testament which introduce the word repentance in its relation to covenant people. There are, likewise, passages which employ the word repentance as a synonym of believing (cf. Acts 17:30; Rom. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25; 2 Pet. 3:9). Also, there are passages which refer to a change of mind (Acts 8:22; 11:18; Heb. 6:1, 6; 12:17; Rev. 9:20, etc.). Yet, again, consideration must be accorded three passages related to Israel which are often misapplied (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31). There are references to John's baptism, which was unto repentance, that are outside the Synoptics (Acts 13:24; 19:4).

Four passages deserve more extended consideration, namely:

Luke 24:47. "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

It will be seen that repentance is not in itself equivalent to believing or faith, though, being included in believing, is used here as a synonym of the word believe. Likewise, it is to be recognized that "remission of sins" is not all that is proffered in salvation, though the phrase may serve that purpose in this instance. Above all, the passage does not require human obligations with respect to salvation. Repentance, which here represents believing, leads to



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remission of sin.

Acts 11:18. "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

Again repentance, which is included in believing, serves as a synonym for the word belief. The Gentiles, as always, attain to spiritual life by faith, the all-important and essential change of mind. It is also true that the passage does not prescribe two things which are necessary to salvation (cf. vs. 17).

Acts 20:21 "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

First, though unrelated to the course of this argument, it is important to note that the Apostle here places Jews on the same level with Gentiles, and both are objects of divine grace. The Jew with his incomparable background or the Gentile with his heathen ignorance, each, must undergo a change of mind respecting God. Until they are aware of God's gracious purpose, there can be no reception of the idea of saving faith. It is quite possible to recognize God's purpose, as many do, and not receive Christ as Savior. In other words, repentance toward God could not itself constitute, in this case, the equivalent of "faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," though it may prepare for that faith. The introduction of the two Persons of the Godhead is significant, and that Christ is the sole object of faith is also most vital. Those who would insist that there are here two human obligations unto salvation are reminded again of the 150 portions in which such a twofold requirement is omitted.

Acts 26:20. "But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."

Again, both Jews and Gentiles are addressed as on the same footing before God. Two obligations are named here, in order that spiritual results may be secured - those to "repent and turn to God." The passage would sustain the Arminian view if repentance were, as they assert, a sorrow for sin; but if the word is given its correct meaning, namely, a change of mind, there is no difficulty. The call is for a change of mind which turns to God. This passage, also, has its equivalent in I Thessalonians 1:9, "Ye turned to God from idols."

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing, an attempt has been made to demonstrate that the Biblical doctrine of repentance offers no objection to the truth that salvation is by grace through faith apart from every suggestion of human works or merit. It is asserted that repentance, which is a change of mind, enters of necessity into the very act of believing on Christ, since one cannot turn to Christ from other objects of confidence without that change of mind. Upwards of 150 texts - including all of the greatest gospel invitations - limit the human responsibility in salvation to believing or to faith. To this simple requirement nothing could be added if the glories of grace are to be preserved.