

True Genuine Bible Repentance

By Pastor Art Watkins

Every man God called to preach in the Bible preached repentance in both Old and New Testaments.

The Prophets in the Old Testament:

Ezekiel 14:4-6: Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols; That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.

(These verses show us that repentance is more than just changing your mind, but turning away from something bad, such as idols.)

Jesus Christ in the Four Gospels:

Luke 13:1-5: There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

(Jesus said twice if a person does not repent, he will perish.)

The Apostles in the New Testament:

All of the Apostles in the New Testament preached repentance including Paul. It may surprise some people to know he preached repentance when he preached the Gospel of Grace. In Acts 20, he had a meeting with the elders of the church at Ephesus and he rehearsed what he preached while in Ephesus. He said he testified: ***Both to the Jews, and also to the***

Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. (verse 21) He told them it was his desire to: ***Finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*** (Verse 24)

This shows us that repentance is a part of the Gospel of Grace. If you preach the Gospel of Grace, you should preach repentance as Paul did.

Paul not only preached repentance, but he commanded those who repented to prove they had repented. In Acts 26:20 it says Paul: ***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.***

When a person believed the Gospel of Grace preached by Paul, he did works to prove he had repented. (See Acts 19:17-20) John the Baptist preached the same thing in Matt.3:8.

Repentance is a word and a doctrine misunderstood by most people. The devil has perverted the meaning of the word repentance. He has redefined the word to make repentance a work you must do to be saved. But, what is repentance? First, repentance does not mean you must clean up your life so you become good enough for God to save. That's impossible and if it were true, heaven will be an empty place in eternity. There is none righteous no not one and no amount of "cleaning up your life" can atone for your sins. Lost sinners cannot possibly do anything in the flesh to please God. As far as God is concerned, lost people are dead people and dead people can't do anything.

Repentance is not making a promise to God that you will stop sinning if he will save you. If that were possible, you would not need a Savior. And if God saves those who promise to stop sinning, what happens when they sin after he saves them? God saves sinners who cannot stop sinning, not because they make a false promise he knows they cannot keep.

The best way to define repentance is to notice what people did when they repented. In the Acts 17, Paul preached repentance. In verses 30-31, Paul

said: ***And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.***

It was in this same chapter in Acts, the Thessalonians were saved to whom Paul later wrote the books of 1, 2 Thessalonians. (See Acts 17:1-5) When the Thessalonians heard Paul preach the Gospel of Grace in Acts 17, they believed and repented. But what did they do when they repented? 1 Thessalonians 1:9 says: ***For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.*** They not only believed the Gospel of Grace, but they turned from their idols to the true and living God. This again shows us repentance is more than changing your mind. When people repented in the Bible, they not only changed their minds, but they turned away from something that was bad such as idols.

Paul commanded both Jews and Gentiles to repent when they believed the gospel according to Acts 20:21. But, what did they turn from when they repented?

The Jews

When the Jews who believed Paul's gospel repented, what did they turn from? They turned away from the works of the law and animal sacrifices unto Christ alone to be saved. As long as a Jew believed he could be saved by the works of the law, keeping the commandments and offering animal sacrifices for his sins, God could not and would not save him. He had to repent. He had to turn from works and animal sacrifices to Christ alone before God could save him. It was the works of the law that prevented the Jews from being saved by grace. Therefore, when they repented they turned from the thing that hindered them from being saved, which was the Law of Moses.

In Hebrews 6, Paul writing to the Hebrew believers said: ***Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.*** The dead works the Jews repented of or turned from was the works of the law. The works of the law were dead works, for they could not give life. They repented and turned from the dead works of the law to the life in Christ.

The Gentiles

When the gentiles who believed Paul's gospel repented, what did they turn from? Their idols. The majority of the gentiles saved under Paul's ministry were idol worshippers. Being idol worshippers they had faith and trust in their idols to save them, deliver them, protect them, guide them and to keep them. Their idols were their saviors. What God is to a Christian, idols are to idol worshippers. As long as they had faith and trust in their idols, God could not and would not save them. For them to be saved: they had to do what the Thessalonians did; they had to turn from their idols to the living God to be saved. It was their idols that prevented them from being saved. Therefore, when they repented they turned from the thing that hindered them from being saved which were their idols. That's what the gentiles did when they repented.

Another example is my wife. My wife was a Roman Catholic for nearly 20 years before she was saved. She went to Mass 6 days a week. She was taught and believed salvation was in the Mass, the sacraments and keeping the laws of the church. As long as she believed salvation was by works, God could not and would not save her. She had to repent. She had to turn away from the laws and works of the Catholic Church and trust Christ alone to save her. It was her religion that prevented her from being saved by grace. Therefore, when she repented she turned from the religion that hindered her from being saved. She was like the Jews in Paul's day; she had to repent of her religion! But, as long as she continued to go to Mass and do the works Rome told her to do, God would not save her.

The question is; can a person be saved without repenting? The answer is no. Put on your thinking hat for a minute: I ask you; could a Jew in Paul's day be saved as long as he continued to do the works of the law and offer animal sacrifices for his sins? The answer is obvious, no. He had to turn away from his works before God could save him by grace, because men cannot be saved by grace and works at the same time.

Could a gentile be saved as long as he held on to his idols to save and deliver him? The answer is obvious, no. He had to turn from his idols like the Thessalonians did before God could save him by grace, because a man cannot be saved by false gods and the true God at the same time.

Could a Jew be saved by the gospel and offer animal sacrifices for his sins at the same time? Of course not. Could a gentile be saved and worship his idols at the same time? No. The law is what hindered the Jew from being saved and until he renounced it, God would not save him. The same is true of the gentiles when it came to idols.

This is what true repentance is in the Bible. The meaning has been distorted today by Satan the god of this world. He has turned repentance into a work men must do to be saved. But, we have just seen repentance means to turn from works to be saved by grace. Repentance is not a work you do to be saved. It's turning from works, religion and idols that keep you from being saved. This is what the Prophets, Christ and the Apostles preached when they preached repentance. (This article is available in CD audio.)