

“How shall we then live?” Series #3

IN REPENTANCE

Review

- 1) “In union with Christ” – 1 Cor.1:30
- 2) “By faith” – Rom.1:17; Gal.2:20

Today’s topic:

Question: “How shall we then live?”

Answer: We are to live “in repentance”. In today’s class, we will see that “repenting” is to become a way of life for all God’s people. Both “believing” and “repenting” must be integral and fundamental parts of our daily experience as Christians.

Introduction:

Some of us may have heavy, negative thoughts as we approach this subject. “I need to get myself ready to come under conviction!” Perhaps we associate this topic of “repentance” with a preacher’s shouting: “Repent!” and his long finger pointing at us. So our feelings and thoughts may be heavy and even dark.

Okay, “repentance” has to do with our being “sinners”. And if we don’t like hearing about “sin”, then naturally we’re going to feel unpleasant feelings in any discussion to do with our “sin”.

But all discussion in the Bible to do about sin really is aimed at helping us get rid of sin and walk in freedom. The bottom-line fact is that “sin in any shape or form is far more destructive than we realise” and because of His great love for us, God our Saviour and Rescuer has a plan to set us free from our sin and its evil consequences. And that plan begins with our “repenting” – our turning away from our sin in order that we might receive His forgiveness and grace.

So let's see that our negative thoughts and feelings (coming from within ourselves but certainly "tools" in Satan's hands) could become a blockage in our receiving God's truth today. Let's then come to God's holy Word with a humble spirit trusting in God's Spirit to bring us a fresh understanding of His truth on this very important topic.

There can be no doubt about the importance of this theme in Scripture.

HANDOUT: Word Bible Study "Repentance".

Study & group reflection.

Some questions to ponder:

- What is the meaning of true, biblical "repentance"? Essentially "a change of mind".
- Who is called to "repent"? To both believers & unbelievers.
- What does the Bible say specifically man is to "repent" of/from?
- How does God express this call to "repent"? As a command.
- What does the Bible teach about the HOW in "repenting"?
- What is the link between "repenting" and "believing"?
- In sharing the Gospel, is "repenting" to be given the same focus for everyone?

What is true, biblical "repentance"?

Some quotes from several evangelical dictionaries:

"The most important aspect of OT repentance, however, is contained in the Hebrew word *shub*, which expresses the idea of turning back, retracing one's steps in order to return to the right way." (From Harper's Bible Dictionary.)

"REPENTANCE. In the OT two words are regularly translated 'repent' or some near equivalent with the following meanings: 'be sorry, change one's mind', and in the sense, 'turn back, return' . . .

"The call for repentance on the part of man is a call for him to return to his creaturely (and covenant) dependence on God." (From IVF's The New Bible Dictionary.)

Hence some modern translations like Good News Bible actually use that very phrase: "Change your mind!" instead of the more traditional word/term: "Repent!"

So when God calls man to “change his mind”, what is He really asking him to do?
What then does the Bible teach us about repentance as “changing our minds”?

1) **What is implied by the word “change”?**

- a) “Repent” is a call to change. Though it is spoken about as a “gift” (see Acts 5:31;11:18), “repenting” is an action step that an individual must take. It is not just something that occurs on the inside. See Luke 3:7-14.
- b) When we use the word “to change”, what do we mean/imply? We mean a change from one thing to another, a move from one action to another, stopping doing one thing and starting to do something else.
- c) Let’s think further about “change”.
 - i) “Change” is for most adults is generally difficult whereas it is much easier for children and youth who are in the stage of life of rapid change & development. By the time a person reaches adulthood, they believe firmly in their own ideas and beliefs and in many instances are ready to defend them.
 - ii) Adults will only change if they are truly convinced that there is something better than what they have believed in to this point, or where there is an awareness that what they have been believing is not answering their perceived needs.
 - iii) Consider how the advertising industry through mass media (TV, radio, magazines etc.) works to influence people towards change – putting before them other options, influencing their thinking in subtle ways to feel dissatisfied with what they have been doing or a product they have been using, in order that they will change to a different product. They seek to influence people’s minds and emotions in such a way that they will then make a choice (use their wills) in a particular way. Example: Playing on a person’s desire to be on the “in” crowd and to look “cool”, they advertise smoking as a “cool” habit for those who want to have friends; or how you will appear in front of your friends if you drive a particular car etc. And they even support their call to change with “testimonies”. Most of us think that we don’t need to change but we can be subtly influenced by the

hidden materialistic values around us (“Look modern!” “Be cool!” et al) so that we become willing to change or to conform in keeping with the call to change.

- iv) God calls us “to change” – because He knows that we need to change; that the way we are living and acting right now isn’t for our own good. In fact, if we don’t change, we will suffer very severe consequences both in their world as well as when we meet Him face to face.
- v) And He calls us to change as believers as we need to conform our lives and actions and words to His will so that we will reflect His glory among the nations.

2) **What do we have to change?**

- a) “Repenting” as a “change of mind” focuses upon changing our MINDS.
- b) Then we need to ask the question: How does the Bible define or understand “our minds”? What do we need to change in our minds?
 - i) God has made us as spiritual and physical beings. The Bible speaks about our being bodies, souls and spirits (1 Thess.5:23), with our spirits that which makes us truly distinct from all other created life.
 - ii) Our “soul” is normally understood to include our minds, emotions and wills.
 - iii) Our minds have to do primarily with our thoughts, the way we think, what we think, how we think (our attitudes), our core beliefs, convictions, values, etc.
 - iv) God’s Word teaches us that God reveals or communicates His “truth” or “knowledge” (which forms the very foundation of our Christian faith) to our minds and through our minds into our hearts = the very heart or seat of our beings, the centre of our choices and decisions, where the springs of life come from (Prov.4:23). The mind is like the gateway into inner recesses of our hearts from where we make all our choices and decisions in life, large and small.
 - v) What we think and ponder on will eventually take root in our hearts and influence our whole lives. (This is NOT referring to the many ideas,

thoughts, etc. that merely pass through and out of our minds in a given day.)

- c) God's truth ("knowledge" of Himself and His ways as written down for us in His Word) is to be first apprehended in our minds and from there to flow into our inner beings so that it affects the totality of our beings. See Psalm 51:6.
- d) In this matter, we notice how very, very different is "God's truth" that we are to consider in our minds and general "knowledge" or ideas that we might pick up through the daily course of life.
 - i) Examples: "Knowledge" of a good computer program, tasty food, a new diet, etc. We may change our lives on the basis of what some new facts or information that we take into our minds and either agree with or want to experiment with.
 - ii) However, biblical "knowledge" is on a far different level, the level that affects the very core of our being. Thus whenever "God's truth" only changes a person's "ideas" (on their intellectual level), it is not considered in Scripture to be apprehended "truth" as it doesn't make its way through the mind into a person's life-style, way of living, way of behaving.
 - iii) In the Scriptures, "truth" changes and affects radically the whole person. And if it doesn't, then it is not truth "known" or "believed in", it is still just on the level of "ideas".
- e) All of this means that "repenting" or "changing one's mind" has is integrally linked with what God's truth. Or in other words, "repenting" has to do with what God reveals to our minds through His Word, that is,
 - i) truth or knowledge about Himself (versus the ideas and distortions of man),
 - ii) truth about His ways (versus what normal citizens in a particular country have come to accept as "good" or "evil/bad" or "right" and "wrong" behaviour),
 - iii) who we are (versus who we think we are or who other people tell us we are), etc.
- f) This means that when God calls upon man to change his mind (= repent), He is leading man right to take a step that affects the very core of his convictions, belief systems, ideas, world-view, values, et al.

g) Therefore, we must think of “repentance” as a radical change on the very deepest level of man’s mind and being, affecting every part of his life. This may be seen in the call of John the Baptist and Jesus to mark the beginning of the new age, ie the coming of God’s kingdom. It called for a radical change in thinking from before. See Matt.3:2;4:17.

3) **What in particular are we called to change our minds about?**

- a) The simple answer (as we have already noticed) is: “Repenting” is about changing our fundamental beliefs – *from* what we ourselves imagine or think to be “truth” *to* what God Himself has revealed through His Word and continues to reveal through His Spirit.
- i) This covers so many areas of our faith and life:
- (1) our deepest thoughts about God,
 - (2) our thoughts about ourselves,
 - (3) our attitudes towards other people,
 - (4) our behaviour (ie how we behave or what we do in our daily lives) et al.
- b) Behind “repentance” then lies a new understanding of certain fundamental truths. “Repentance” doesn’t begin with my “guilty feelings” or in my feeling upset or sad/remorseful because I have done something I consider bad. Rather it begins in “truth” or knowledge of God’s ways that He has revealed to man.
- c) Another way of expressing the true nature of “repentance” is to say that it has its origin:
- i) in our coming to know and understand God’s view or verdict on a particular sin or idea or thought etc., AND
 - ii) our coming to agree with and accept God’s view or verdict.
 - (1) Example: Dishonesty in business practices today is rife. Or cheating/stealing from the government on one’s income tax return. Now if we listen to the opinion of many people around us, even to fellow-believers, we will conclude: If being dishonest benefits us, eg in having more money, then it’s okay. Just hope that you don’t get caught. On the other hand, when we read God’s Word, we come to know our Father as “the God of truth” and that He calls His people to

live honestly. So for a person to truly “repent”, he/she needs to first hear God’s verdict on the matter, then agree with it (confession), and then take action based on what God says (= changing in some particular way – either in one’s mind or behaviour or life-style etc.).

(2) Example: To “repent” about “telling a lie” or being deceitful in what we said (including exaggeration or flattery etc.) needs to spring from a biblical understanding that this behaviour is contrary to God’s law, God’s holy character, and not just because we get ourselves into hot water or trouble by not telling the truth. (There are some instances in the Scripture, especially in contexts of war, when telling a lie is condoned – when you are confronted with an enemy and to tell the truth is going to cause you and many others to be hurt, captured or killed. See Joshua 2:1 ff.) Again to “repent” of lying means: To embrace God’s view of behaviour, to agree with God’s verdict even in the face of what other people think or say, and then to take action on the basis of God’s mind or thoughts – to put off telling lies and to put on speaking the truth. See Eph.4:22-25.

(3) Example: An unmarried Christian couple who are living in sin, and then repent, must then change their life-style. Otherwise their repentance is without meaning or substance.

iii) So God calls us to repent = to change our minds from thinking contrary to His ways and will about any particular issue in our lives and to embrace the way He thinks. “Repenting” is changing – leaving behind whatever is contrary to God’s will and doing whatever He has commanded us to do. It is learning to hate the thing that God hates and to love the thing that God loves (Rom.12:9). This is true and genuine repentance.

- 4) **Who is to “repent”?** Is it just “unbelievers”? Or does God command all sinners in whatever situation of life to change their minds about their sin and turn to Him to receive His forgiveness?
- a) There is the first or initial repentance for all people in order to receive God’s blessings of forgiveness, eternal salvation and the Holy Spirit, in order that they might inherit God’s kingdom. See Acts 2:38; 3:19. Note the language of

“command” in Acts 17:30, which means that God’s servants are called to “summon” people everywhere to turn from their sins, rather than try to water down their need to repent by speaking only comforting messages to sinners who are in danger of facing God’s wrath and judgment unless they repent.

- b) The call to repent is for all who disobey God’s laws and commands, which also includes “all believers”. See 2 Cor.12:21; 2 Tim.2:25. Perhaps our initial repentance may have been shallow. Perhaps some Christians really need to go back to the beginning and re-establish a right basis for their following Jesus. This is very important even for missionaries this may be absolutely important and life-changing. But then our Christian lives is a growth in understanding and awareness. We are growing all the time as we come to understand what the Bible teaches – and what we need to leave behind as wrong ideas or even false teaching in order to embrace and follow God’s ways and truths. So God’s people need to put on truth as God reveals it to them including a deeper understanding of “repentance”. Also to teach it to others lest the repentance that we ask of others is shallow and not in keeping with God’s truth. In other words, a repentance that does not lead to life. See 2 Cor.7:9-10.

5) **When are we to “repent”, to change our minds? How often?**

- a) The simple answer is: Whenever we sin. Whether our “sin” is in the eyes of some just a small or minor matter, or something far more serious (especially considering its consequences), God calls for us to “repent”, to turn away from our sin, to change our minds towards that sin, and at the same time to turn to Him for inner cleansing and renewal.
- b) This implies also that we may repent more than once over the same sin. See Luke 17:3,4. We should not understand that the first “repentance” was insincere. Repentance must come from the heart. But in this matter we realise the depth of our sinfulness, our proneness to wander and return to our sinful ways. This is why “repenting” must be seen by all believers (not just a message believers give to unbelievers!) as a way of life – what needs to be a part of our spiritual lives every day). To hear God’s Spirit calling us to repent is His call to experience life in place of the spiritual death that is caused by our sin.

6) What happens when we “repent”?

- a) God hears our confession of guilt and sin and sees our earnestness in the changes that take place (= the fruits of repentance), and that very moment we are restored to fellowship with Himself. All is forgiven and forgotten because of His grace. And this happens EVERY TIME we turn from our sin and receive His free gift of forgiveness. Note how “repenting” and “believing” go together. To “repent” but fail to “believe” God’s promise to forgive and restore leaves a person wide open to Satan’s evil and destructive tactics.
- b) God gives to us the blessings of “rest”, “peace of mind” and “inner freedom” in place of a break in fellowship with Himself and the accompanying troubled conscience. See Isaiah 30:15.

Conclusion:

What about us – you and me? What is our need of practising “repentance” today?

What is God saying to you and me? What has been our working attitude towards sin in our lives? Have we been practising genuine “repentance”? Has “repenting” become the normal way for you to respond to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit?

Read and meditate on Galatians 5:13-26. As you read and open your heart up to God, listen to His voice speaking about any present matter in your lives. “Repent” and “believe” the Good News.

Summary of “repentance”:

- 1) A positive agreement in our minds and hearts with God’s view and verdict concerning that particular thought, attitude, action, value, belief etc.
- 2) A simple, specific, sincere and humble confession of that sin to our heavenly Father.
- 3) Visible change or “fruit”. Walking in obedience to God’s mind, allowing His mind to take deep root in our minds going right down into our innermost being/hearts.

We may find “repenting” hard at times, but as we allow the Spirit of God to speak into our lives whatever is “true” and “right” and “good”, then we will see that “repenting” or changing our minds from what we have been thinking is the first step in taking on the mind of Christ so that we walk in the truth – and that truth sets us free. See John 8:32.

Other questions/issues:

1) Does a missionary or an evangelist need to understand all these things about “repentance” before he/she can share the Gospel and lead a person to true repentance & faith in Christ? Many of course haven’t been taught such things. But this is no excuse for us to downplay the importance of knowing God’s truth and calling people to living faith through the path of repentance.

2) Does everyone need to pass through the same process of repenting? What about a child? Isn’t “believing in Jesus” enough? What if they have never really sinned badly? Do they still need to repent?

3) What is the link between “faith” and “repentance”? In first-time believing and also throughout one’s Christian life? What are we going to tell people they need to do according to the Scriptures to be saved? Of course, we want to make it simple and plain so that people don’t have to pass through many hoops or hurdles in order to become a follower of Jesus. And from our side, it’s our longing to see people share in God’s gift of life and forgiveness. However, if our message to unbelievers is: “Just believe!” (meaning, “All you need to do is to believe certain facts about Jesus and then confess them, and you’re a believer”), then we end up with “easy believism” where people imagine themselves to be believers whereas in reality they remain still in their sins and evil ways and have just experienced a “white-wash” on the outside or have joined some religious group or church. In other words, they have not turned from their old way of life in order to follow Jesus (= do as He asks). So we have to conclude that if a person believes in Jesus but that “belief” is just an addition to what he or she already held to, then that person is still “lost” and apart from God. Their faith is not a true saving faith.

4) What call or challenge should we give to unbelievers? If we are in an evangelistic setting, we need to help a person to understand what it means for him/her to become a true believer: a turning away from sin in order to turn to Christ. Giving up their former “master” in order to follow their true “Master”, Jesus. “Repenting” then must spring from a new view about sin from God’s view, that every person whether good or bad, religious or secular, is “lost” in their sins and needs to come to God to be saved. That every person has sinned against God’s holy laws whether often or seemingly very infrequently and is unable to do anything that pleases God in his/her own power and strength. “Believing” is not sufficient by itself. It must go together with “repenting” as it is impossible for man to put his faith in God and believe what God says is truth without rejecting what is contrary to God and His will in every aspect.