



## THE GIFT OF REPENTANCE PART 1 & 2: MAKING REPENTANCE A PRIORITY

Steve Berger

When I was a kid, I remember seeing people on the street corner or at football games holding up signs that said, “Repent.” You’ve probably seen them too.

At the time, it always seemed like they were just weirdos and wackos who maybe meant well but were a little off on their messaging. But over the years I’ve come to believe they were actually onto something. Regardless of their eccentricities, they were actually onto a powerful biblical truth...

*God has given humanity one option to be healed spiritually – to come into a right relationship with him – and that prescription is repentance.*

That’s all. God’s given us one thing. And because God’s given us one thing, we should be proclaiming that one thing more than anything else.

Yet you don’t hear much about repentance these days. Do you know why?

The reason we’re not talking much about repentance is because the thing we need to repent from, which is sin, isn’t a hot topic anymore. Sins have become mistakes, failures, mess-ups... things we all do, so it’s not that big of a deal. After all, nobody’s perfect.

As a result of this casual view of sin, we forget the high cost of sinning. Consequently, we don’t talk about repenting or turning from sin and turning to God.

Tragically, this leaves millions of people weighed down by sin and ravaged by its consequences. They are oppressed, afflicted, and spiritually dried up because no one is telling them how to be forgiven of their sin and refreshed by the grace of God.

Christians should be more aware of this problem, but too many pulpits aren’t addressing the reality of sin. Why? Because many pastors fear that if they call out sin, they’ll lose members.

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So pastors avoid the topic, and people in their congregation continue in a cycle of suffering. Russian dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote what is considered to be one of the greatest non-fiction works of all time, *The Archipelago Gulag*. The content emerged from his time in the Russian forced labor camps, or Gulag. He was a phenomenal Christian mind. And in 1983, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, in a speech called “Men Have Forgotten God,” said:



*“All attempts to find a way out of the plight of today’s world are fruitless unless we redirect our consciousness in repentance to the creator of all. Without this repentance, no exit will be illumined, and we shall seek deliverance in vain. The other resources we have set aside for ourselves besides repentance are too impoverished for the task.”*

His words still ring true today.

*There is no other way out of the mess we’re in apart from repentance.*

Repentance is the one thing that God has prescribed in order for a person to get right with Him and experience spiritual healing. Nothing else will do.

Solzhenitsyn went on to say, “We must first recognize the horror perpetrated not by some outside force, not by class or national enemies, but within each of us individually and within every society. This is especially true of a free and a highly developed society, for here in particular we have surely brought everything upon ourselves of our own free will. We ourselves in our daily unthinking selfishness are pulling tight the noose.”

The condition in which we find ourselves today, in our free society is our own fault. We can’t blame other people. America has brought this on herself. Operating by our God-given free will in the freest society in the world, we’ve tightened our own noose.

Meanwhile, the one thing that can save us is the one thing no one is talking about.

The message of repentance *must* become our top priority – something Scripture makes this abundantly clear.

Mark 1:1–5 says...

*The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:*

*“I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way”—  
“a voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.’”*

*And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.*



John, as the promised transitional figure between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, comes on the scene with one powerful message: Repent.

As he preaches repentance for the remission, the removal, and forgiveness of sins, people flock to him in droves.

Later in Mark, Jesus himself affirms this message and priority. Mark 1:14–15 says...

*After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”*

John the Baptist ministered for a year and a half before he was thrown in prison. When Jesus came onto the scene, He picked up John’s work and began to preach the same message of repentance.

If we go all the way to the end of Jesus’ message and ministry, we come to the book of Revelation. In Revelation, chapters two and three, Jesus addresses the seven churches in Asia Minor. Can you guess his message?

*Repent.*

So, at the very beginning of Jesus’ message, He preached repentance. Then at the end of Jesus’ communication in written form to the church, He preaches repentance. Jesus starts and ends His ministry with the message of repentance.

That’s a clear indication that repentance is a priority to Jesus.

How about the disciples? Did the disciples learn from Jesus’ early ministry? You better believe it! Mark 6:12 speaks of the twelve disciples and it says...

*They went out and preached that people should repent.*

They understood the assignment. They knew that if they were going to be faithful followers and messengers of Jesus, they needed to preach repentance as well.

On the day of Pentecost, when Jesus’ followers received the Holy Spirit, we see what the apostle Peter does in Acts 2:37–38 when speaking to a large crowd in Jerusalem...

*When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”*

*Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*



In Peter's first sermon on the day of Pentecost, he preaches repentance. Later, in the last epistle that Peter writes, his message remains the same. Second Peter 3:9 says...

*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

Peter, like Jesus, begins and ends his ministry with the message of repentance.

What about the apostle Paul, did he preach repentance? Absolutely.

There's no greater example of Paul's preaching on repentance than when he debated the philosophers on Mars Hill.

In Acts 17:30, Paul says to his audience...

*"In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent."*

Think about that. God commands repentance. It's not a suggestion. It's not an option. God commands that everybody, everywhere needs to repent.

Now, preaching repentance requires addressing people's sin. What good is repentance if I don't understand what I need to repent of? A person can only repent if they see their sin clearly so they can turn from it and move from unrighteousness to righteousness.

Later in Acts, Paul is in the great theater in Caesarea. Thousands of people are listening to Paul give his defense about his personal testimony – the vision he had and what God did to save him. And he's talking to none other than King Agrippa himself. And what does Paul say?

Acts 26:19–20 says...

*"So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds."*

He's speaking of the fruits of repentance. It isn't just confession of sin, but a subsequent moving into works and actions that are befitting of repentance. What are the works and actions that are befitting of repentance? A changed lifestyle, changed behavior, changed actions.

The message of repentance, the priority of repentance couldn't be clearer in the Scripture. It is the single message, the single hope that God gives us as individuals.



But it isn't only for individuals. And we need to remember this here in the United States of America.

Jeremiah 18:7–8 says,

*“If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.”*

You see, God is not talking to individuals here, he's talking to entire kingdoms or nations. A great example of that is Nineveh. God intended to destroy Nineveh, but He sent Jonah to preach repentance and give them an opportunity to avert judgment. As a result, the people repented, and God spared them. That's God keeping his promise.

We find ourselves in a similar situation today in this nation.

Our only hope in the United States of America is that this nation will come to its senses, confess its sin, and return to God so that God might heal us. I wish more pastors were preaching this message.

Now that we've established that repentance is a biblical priority – it was preached by John the Baptist, Christ Himself, the disciples, and the apostle Paul – I want to examine four questions about repentance.

**Number one, what is repentance?** Repentance is a change of heart and a change of mind that causes us to confess our sin, turn away from our sin, and turn toward God.

Anything shy of this isn't repentance.

**Number two, why is repentance needed?** Repentance is needed, first, because sin causes us to be separated from God. If we don't want to be separated from God – and we don't – we must repent of sin. Isaiah 59:1–2 says...

*Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save,  
nor his ear too dull to hear.  
But your iniquities have separated  
you from your God;  
your sins have hidden his face from you,  
so that he will not hear.*



Sin separates us from God, and unrepentant habitual sin causes God to turn His face away from us. So we have to repent. But there's another reason why repentance is necessary. We need to repent because sin that is not repented of ultimately leads to death.

It doesn't get more serious than this. Separation from God and spiritual death. Roman 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ." Continue in sin and be separated from God and die, or repent and turn to God and receive eternal life in Christ. The choice seems obvious, doesn't it?

**Number three, what does repentance from sin produce?** Just as failing to repent leads to horrible consequences, choosing to repent lead to wonderful blessing as it produces fruit in the life of a believer.

First of all, repentance produces the forgiveness of sin and the refreshing of our spirit. As Peter says in Acts 3:19...

*Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

God promises two amazing blessings as the result of repenting of sin. First, our sins are forgiven – blotted out, removed from us as far as the east is from the west. Second, we experience a refreshing of our spirit. Psalm 32 says that when we are silent and hold back from repentance, our vitality is sapped. We become spiritually parched, dry, dead, and decaying. This is the result of unrepentance.

But in Acts 3, Peter describes the exact opposite. With repentance comes a refreshing from God. The spirit of God blows afresh and anew on our life, and we experience the joy and vitality of His presence.

Repentance also produces spiritual life here and now and eternal life later. Repentance is the very lynchpin for life. Through repentance, you access the abundant life for today that Jesus promises in John 10:10, as well as the eternal life promised to all who turn to Christ.

So repentance produces the forgiveness of sin, the refreshing of your spirit, abundant life now and eternal life later. What a deal!

Why are we not shouting this good news from the rooftops? The message of repentance offers the hope our world desperately needs. This brings me to the fourth question about repentance.

**How does someone repent?** To start with, you have to actually agree with God that you're sinning. There is that sense of coming to yourself and coming to your senses. In John 16:8, Jesus said, speaking of the Holy Spirit...



*When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment.*

What does the Holy Spirit do? The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin so that we will agree with God and His Word that we are indeed sinners.

Repentance must begin by agreeing with God about our sin. It's not just a mistake. It's not just a weakness. It's not just a struggle. No, it's sin. It's breaking God's law and living contrary to God's word, will, and ways.

We cannot minimize sin and pretend like it's not that big a deal. Sin is devastating and it separates us from God. It's *the* problem of our broken universe. We've got to agree with God about the reality of sin and our culpability in committing it. That's the very beginning point.

The next thing we need to do is turn from our sin and turn to God. In 2 Corinthians 7:9–10 Paul writes...

*Yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*

We rarely sin in a vacuum. It always affects other people. Worldly sorrow isn't concern that you broke God's law and you broke God's heart. It's just being sorry that got caught. It's saying, "I really don't care that I've hurt God. I really don't care that I've hurt other people. I just wish I didn't get caught."

Godly sorrow, on the other hand, is sorry that you've rebelled against a holy God. It causes you to turn from your sin and run back to God. Godly sorrow produces repentance that leads to salvation, and it's never to be regretted.

The next thing that we need to do is confess our sin. First John 1:8–9 tells us that if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from every bit of unrighteousness.

James 5:16 says the same thing, that we need to confess our trespasses to one another and pray for one another so that we can be healed.

This is something that's missing far too often in the life of believers today because we don't understand the importance of sin. We don't understand the importance of repenting. We don't understand the importance of being sorry and confessing our sin, and we've got people that are being crushed under the weight of their sin as a result.



This isn't just about you confessing and repenting when you become a believer. This is part of our life as God reveals sin to us. I don't care if it's a pastor like me or someone sitting in the pews. We all need to confess and repent when we're guilty of sin.

Acknowledge that we've sinned, agree with God that it's sin, confess it, and then turn from sin to the grace of God.

One of the most famous stories, not just in all the Bible, but in all the world is the story of the prodigal son. It's a summary of what repentance looks like based on the points we've just examined. Luke 15:17–24 says of the prodigal son...

*"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' So he got up and went to his father.*

*"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

*"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'*

*"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."*

This is what repentance looks like. The prodigal came to himself – he was convicted of his sin. He agreed with what was right and wrong. He agreed that what he was doing was sinful. He knew he was in sin, so he comes to himself. Then what does he do?

He turns from his sin. He turns to his father. He said, "I will arise. I'm going to get up out of this mess I've created for myself, and I'm going to go to my father." That's turning from sin.

When he gets to his father, he confesses his sin. He says, "Father, I'm not even worthy to be called your son anymore. I've sinned against you. I've sinned against heaven. I've blown it, and I'm sorry."

Then comes the best part! What does his repentance produce?

Forgiveness. Refreshing. A restored relationship and life.

True repentance always leads to the kindness of our God and Father embracing us in His love and grace.





This is what Jesus promises us as individuals, and this is what Jesus promises any nation that will turn, confess, repent, and run to God for forgiveness.

So let's preach this message. Let's be quick to repent personally and eagerly share the message of repentance corporately.

Because repentance is our only hope.

### **Take Your Study Further**

*For verses God's response to repentance:* 2 Chronicles 7:14, Ezekiel 18:21–23, Proverbs 28:13, Isaiah 55:6–7

*For verses about what repentance does for us:* James 4:8, 2 Timothy 2:25, Zechariah 1:3

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