

REPENTANCE - KNOWING WHY AND KNOWING HOW - Both Are Important - Part one - Sunday, August 16th, 2012, 6:30 p.m.

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THE KINDS OF CHANGES TRULY REPENTANT PEOPLE MAKE (Part 1)

Whenever you take a passage in the New Testament that records teaching for the church you have to take some care to remember where the events are framed in terms of God's full revelation of the saving work of Jesus Christ. This doesn't mean some texts are *more inspired* than others. It simply means God has, in His sovereign wisdom, unpacked the full message of His saving grace *gradually* in the events of recorded history in the Scriptures.

Luke 3:3-14 - "And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. [4] As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.[5] Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, [6] and all flesh shall see the salvation of God" [So John predicts something still in the future - "shall see"] [7] He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? [8] Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.'" [So with the coming of God's salvation the nature of repentance will change. In the Old Testament repentance meant *returning to their covenant status as Abraham's descendants*. With the coming of the Redeemer, repentance will mean *refusing to rely on their Old Testament heredity for their standing with God.*] For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. [9] Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." [10] "And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" [And the fruit must be good in the sense that it can't be rooted in Old Testament law or mere outward moral reform. In a way John the Baptist couldn't fully see, the people's repentance and righteousness needed to be rooted in the coming "*salvation of God*"(6).] [11] And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise." [12] Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" [13] And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." [14] Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by

threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

Picture a couple of scenes with me as we begin this series:

Imagine a man on the street corner, somewhere in the seedy side of Brooklyn, New York. He wears a sandwich sign over his back and chest with the words "Repent! The end is near!" But the people just give him strange looks as they go by, wishing he'd take a shower and clean up. No one takes him seriously.

Now imagine a setting in some small camp meeting in southern Mississippi or Alabama. The night air is hot and humid. The floor is strewn with shavings and sawdust. People chant and sway to loud, intense music. A hand painted church sign outside the little church reads "Revival Meetings Nightly." Inside, a minister wipes his forehead with a big hankie and tells the unsaved they need to "repent of their sins" because Jesus is coming soon.

Now, as much as we might differ culturally with those two scenes, they both contain a message of truth. Sinners **do** need to repent. That message has never changed. The call to the lost to repent of their sins and come to Jesus Christ still stands for all peoples of all cultures. We never become so sophisticated that we don't need Jesus Christ as our Savior.

But, while those two scenes both contain a message of truth, they both convey a terrible message of error as well. They both lead to the false idea that repentance is for **bad** people - for the **unsaved**. At the very least, they convey the idea that repentance is for people who are **backslidden** and **careless** in their spiritual life.

All of this sets the stage for the main point of this little series. Repentance is **not** just for unsaved people, or backslidden people. Repentance is for **me**. And repentance is for

you. In fact, I would argue that nothing is more deadening to your ongoing spiritual life than the careless cultivation of the idea that repentance is something you do when you **get saved** or when you really **mess up morally**.

Here's a key point: **Repentance is not just an evangelical way of getting out of a spiritual tight spot.** And people wouldn't **find** themselves in so many crisis spiritual situations if they didn't leave the practice of **ongoing** repentance on the shelf of their Christian walk.

Repentance can be defined as basically two things:

- a) **Repentance is a radical recognition of the true nature of the human will**
- b) **Repentance is a continual reshaping of the human mind and life**

Both of these key ideas aren't just pulled out of thin air. They are actually rooted in the meaning of the word "repentance" itself. Luke uses the noun form of the word in verse 8. You've heard it before. The Greek word for repentance is **metanoia**. **Meta** ("after") and **noeo** ("to perceive with the mind"). This defines repentance perfectly. It's what you do **after** you perceive with your **mind**.

For the New Testament Christian repentance is truth perceived in the mind **in the full light of God's grace revealed in the cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ**. This world's different from mere moral improvement.

While I won't take the time to **repeat** that reminder every time I talk about repentance tonight, **that's the foundation I'm assuming** every time I talk about the kind of changes repentant people make. **John the Baptist doesn't put this into words in his preaching because Jesus hadn't been crucified or risen from the dead.**

Repentance is what you do once you perceive with your mind, your understanding, some fresh point of input from the Holy Spirit upon your life. It's what you do when some point of fresh **correction** is made clear, or what you do when some fresh point of **action or obedience** is pointed out. Repentance is how we respond to these frequent **sins of omission** in our hearts.

The key to a proper understanding of all of this is **repentance is what you do once you come to understand**. The essence of repentance isn't just feelings of guilt or remorse. It isn't just telling God you're sorry. The central core of repentance is the **action you take** upon **hearing God's voice**.

The Holy Spirit brings some fresh point of understanding to your mind. Then **repentance has its roots in what you do**. That's what the people were asking John in Luke's account - **"What must we do?"(3:10)**. They knew from John's message that they had to **do** something. John wasn't just calling them to memorize Bible verses. He wasn't just telling them to get more involved in organized religion. To their credit these people immediately sensed they had to **act**. They had to **make changes**.

But here's the important point. This attitude isn't just related to the **unsaved**. Yes, it applies to those who come to salvation, but it doesn't **just** apply to them. You and I are called to live our whole lives **repentantly** before the Lord. **Regeneration** (getting saved) is related to repentance the way the **front doors** are related to the rest of this **church building**. Regeneration ushers believers into a lifestyle of ongoing repentance. **Christians live in repentance the way a fish lives in water**.

Listen, **the growth of the Kingdom always follows the path of repentance**. Notice the way I worded that sentence. It's not just the **entrance** into the kingdom that is

contingent upon repentance. My **growth** in the kingdom also hinges on repentance. This distinction is made so clear and definite in the New Testament:

Acts 11:18 - "When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

Compare this verse with Paul's words in another key passage:

2 Corinthians 7:9-10 - "As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. [10] For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death."

In **Acts 11** Peter speaks. He praises God that the Gentiles - the **pagans** - are coming to Christ. They are experiencing the **repentance that leads to life**. They were **dead in sins** but they were coming to **life in Christ** through repentance.

Then, in **2 Corinthians chapter 7** Paul describes the experience of **Christians** who responded positively to his letter of rebuke and correction to them. He says they experienced **repentance unto salvation**.

This is an important distinction. When I was saved I was brought by God's grace in Christ Jesus out of **death** into **life**. I experienced repentance unto life. What I am living in now, as a child of God is my **salvation**. My salvation isn't just the day I gave my heart to the Lord in Prince George, B.C. in 1962. That's when I was born again. But what I am living in **right now** is my salvation. My salvation is still unfolding right now, day by day, as I walk in the Lord.

So Paul writes to these **Christians** in the church at Corinth. He rejoices over them

because they responded so humbly and so openly - so **repentantly** - to the Spirit's correcting work in their heart. They repented from carelessness. Their repentance kept them from **falling backwards** spiritually. They experienced **repentance unto salvation**.

In other words, they were **moving further into their salvation**. They were pressing forward - pressing deeper into the life of the Kingdom. But this advance wasn't an accident. It was directly related to their ongoing experience of **repentance before the Lord**.

That is the whole point of this first message in this series. The only repentance that counts is **Monday** repentance. It's what you **do** with **Sunday** truth. This is a passage about **what happens after the preaching or the Bible study**. Repentance is what you do **after you perceive with your mind** what the Holy Spirit is calling you to **at this moment** of your salvation.

It's ongoing repentance that keeps the transformation of my life by the Word and Spirit of God a current, living reality. This is how I am continually made to be more and more like Jesus Christ. This is how my life is pruned and cleaned from more and more of the world and the flesh.

Luke, in our text, shows us very clearly the **kinds of changes** repentant people make. What does **Monday repentance** look like? That's what we're going to study next Sunday night.