

***A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the LORD. Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee. (Psa 102:1)***

Before I get into the meat of today's topic, I want to share something I recently read from Arthur Pink that I hope sets a tone with everyone. We talk frequently about the importance of being here, in person – a “butts in seats” policy as it were. But how much do you think about **why** you personally are here? Just being here is indeed important, but it isn't enough just to show up. Are you putting your mind and heart in the right place? Are you preparing yourself mentally and emotionally to come into the house of God and worship Him? Do you have a good and clear understanding of what it means to worship God?

In the Mosaic era, during the time of the Tabernacle and Temple, worship had very prescriptive actions required for worshippers, and you couldn't emulate them or reproduce them in just any old place in any old way. An ox isn't a goat, your fire pit in the back yard isn't the brazen altar of the Temple, and your cousin Larry isn't descended from Aaron and consecrated as the High Priest. What physical worship looked like was straightforward. We don't have those kinds of prescriptive elements today.

But we do have the same requirement to worship

*“For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God:” (Exo 34:14)*

Which Jesus reiterated and established to still be the case when He said:

*“...Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” (Mat 4:10)*

Worship is closely tied to these concepts:

*“And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” (Deu 6:5)*

*“Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.” (Psa 29:2)*

You can't give the Lord the glory due to His name if you're not focused on Him, especially when you come into His house.

Pink, in his comments on Hebrews 5:11 says some really on point things about this I think. To provide context, the verse says

*“Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.” (Heb 5:11)*

Pink says:

*“How many who sit under the ministry of a true servant of God are "dull of hearing!" There is little waiting upon God, little real exercise of heart, before the service, to prepare them for receiving His message. Instead, the average hearer comes up to the house of God with a mind full of worldly concerns. We have to "lay aside all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness" if we are to "receive with meekness the engrafted Word" (James 1:21). We have to listen unto God's Word with a right motive; not out of idle curiosity, not merely to fulfill a duty, still less for the purpose of criticizing; but that we "may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2) – grow in practical godliness. And, if what we have heard is not to be forgotten, if it is really to profit the soul, it must be meditated upon (Ps. 1:2), and accompanied with earnest prayer for grace to enable us to "heed" what has been heard.”*

This is pretty pointed, but well said. Essentially Pink reminds us that being here isn't the point or the end goal, and it certainly isn't enough to be here bodily but not fully here in heart and mind. Have you prepared your heart this morning to receive His word and to properly devote your thoughts to His worship and glory? Or are you thinking about how you need to mow this afternoon, whether you started the laundry, a sports score, what's coming up at work, what's for lunch, etc.?

Put another way – have you properly and fully considered what this activity is you are engaged in at this very moment? You are purporting to worship, that is devoting the energy of your heart to adoring and outpouring thankfulness to the God who has created you for His purposes and called you here. I say you are purporting to do that, but are you?

I want you to consider for a second what goes into these sermons – the hours of time, thought, discussion, prayer, writing, re-writing, etc., and challenge you to be honest with yourselves – when you come in the door have you spent any time preparing yourself to receive these words and pay obeisance to the King, looking for how you can change your walk to perfect your service? Or are you just here because it was on your schedule to get here by 11:30; another box on the list of things you need to do today?

I'm not suggesting that you have to go lock yourself away and meditate for hours to empty your mind and heart of worldly cares and concerns. I am challenging you to consider the idea that you have an affirmative responsibility to physically set your mind and heart into the right frame when you come in these doors to worship. Laying aside worldly cares takes effort and focus not just to empty yourself of them, but to prepare

yourself to receive the edification prepared for you – a cup can be empty but not ready to receive new contents. I'm also not calling anyone out. Pink's words struck a chord with me personally, causing me to sharply consider my own state of mind and how prepared I am to worship the King when I come here. I am simply sharing some thoughts with you as they struck me. In this increasingly anti-christian world, full of absolute counterfeit fakes who dirty the name of Christianity with their behavior and dishonor the King, keeping on target to the strait gate is critically important. Worshiping the King in truth in this place is a major part of keeping on target.

So, hopefully that is useful to someone. My main goal today is to explore the concept of repentance in some detail. We talk about this a lot in our public ministry and of course in our daily exhortation to one another but I don't know how much time we have spent defining and laying out what it actually is, or maybe what it is not. Based on some recent interactions with folks, I thought it might be helpful to explore it.

I believe this is one of if not the most important elements of our ministry, certainly in the public sphere, but equally in our private ministrations. I place so much importance on this primarily because Christ did. Repentance is where Christ started.

*“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Mat 4:17)*

*“Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” (Mar 1:14-15)*

Repentance was the foundation of Christ's preaching while He was in the earth, and it was the thing He told His Apostles to preach both while He walked with them:

*“And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city. And they went out, and preached that men should repent.” (Mar 6:10-12)*

and then at the end of His first advent He continues its preaching:

*“Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father*

*upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.” (Luk 24:45-49)*

So Christ preached repentance and instructed His followers to do the same. I don't think this is disputable on its face. There is no spectrum of perspective here. He preached repentance, and He did so **right from the start, establishing the message of His ministry plainly**. This is important because it must guide the message and behavior of His followers. It is a base element from which all other things must spring. It is a defining component of being a Christian.

I don't like to be a language geek, but sometimes knowing a little bit about the words helps. The forms of the word repent all come from four source words in the Greek, which I've put in this nice table:

G278	ἀμεταμέλητος	<i>ametamelētos</i>	not repentant of, unregretted; from G1 (as a negative particle) and a presumed derivative of G3338
G3338	μεταμέλομαι	<i>metamelomai</i>	1) it is a care to one afterwards 1a) it repents one, to repent one's self
G3340	μετανοέω	<i>metanoēō</i>	1) to change one's mind, i.e. to repent 2) to change one's mind for better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins; from G3326 and G3539
G3341	μετάνοια	<i>metanoia</i>	a change of mind, as it appears to one who repents, of a purpose he has formed or of something he has done; from G3340

Again, not to geek out on the language, but the crux of what I believe it means to repent is tied up in the root words that make up 3340. 3326 is a primary preposition which denotes accompaniment, and 3539 means fundamentally to exercise the mind; to comprehend, perceive and understand.

So I believe it can be said that repentance isn't just a changing of the mind, or a changing of the mind about a sin. It is a changing of the mind due to understanding and accompanied by action. It's not feeling sorry. It's not feeling contrite. It is exercising the mind to understand the result of the exact sin you've committed being the suffering of Christ on the cross, mourning the truth of that, taking accountability for

it, then moving as far away from it as you can possibly get in your thoughts, words and deeds. Yes, there is contrition and sorrow, but that is not enough. More on this later.

Consider carefully these events

*“Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,” (Mat 27:3)*

This phrase “repented himself” is unique. It basically means he was full of regret. Yes, he regretted what he’d done and literally couldn’t live with it. There was no spiritual repentance present, he didn’t try to undo what he’d done, obviously, but things perhaps got out of hand and went farther than he expected. So he felt really bad about it and killed himself. That doesn’t make him good with the Lord. He repented himself, not repented of his dreadful sins. Regret isn’t repentance.

Consider that Esau regretted what he’d done, too

*“Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.” (Heb 12:16-17)*

You get a better sense of what that seeking with tears looked like in the source text:

*“And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father. And he said, Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing. And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me? And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee, my son? And Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept.” (Gen 27:34-38)*

Regret and sorrow for your behavior isn’t enough. And these two events demonstrate that it is not something that comes from yourself. It must come by the God’s grace.

*“In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure **will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth**; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.” (2Ti 2:25-26)*

Without the sorrow for sin accompanied by the grace of God bringing a person to the acknowledging of the truth, you end up in the same spot as Judas or Esau.

*“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.” (2Co 7:10)*

Repentance doesn't come without at least some element of sorrow, indeed it is needful

*“For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed.” (Psa 31:10)*

*“Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.” (Jas 4:9)*

There is a need and an appropriate sorrow for our sins, but that sorrow by itself is effectual for nothing when it is just a work of the flesh. The strength of the human will and spirit is not significant enough to break from the captivity of the devil and resist doing his will. It's just that simple. God must grant the grace of repentance for it to be effectual.

And don't forget, repentance is commanded:

*“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.” (Act 17:30-31)*

This is of course from Paul's sermon on Mars Hill that Ben covered last week. His words plainly demonstrate that preaching repentance is a necessary component of what we are to do as ambassadors of Christ in the earth, and his message couldn't be plainer – God has commanded men to repent. Not just Jews, or some specific group, but all men to repent of their sins everywhere.

Nothing that God commands goes undone. That's the beauty of the passage in 2 Timothy. His will is irrevocable and will forever be accomplished. That means there will be, without question, those who repent, and it was His will which was accomplished in it, not your own works.

That plain truth, however, doesn't change that the world we live in doesn't think they need to repent. They don't see how they live for the devil and hell as anything requiring correction or change. They have willingly had a fraud hoisted upon them that “Jesus ate with prostitutes and sinners so we're all good the way we are”.

That's a critical element of this false Christianity that is all around us – they wantonly ignore the critical message in this event:

*“She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.” (Joh 8:11)*

He commands the woman to repent! “Go and sin no more”, not “I don't condemn you so you can keep walking in this sinful lifestyle”! Not “I didn't make no junk, so you're perfect just the way you are!” Definitely not “I come to you and accept you in your state, no changes required”. He told her to go and sin no more!

Christ never once said that He accepted sinners who dwelt in their sin willfully. From the beginning He commanded change – if He's teaching from the beginning of His ministry for everyone to “repent and believe the Gospel”, He is absolutely **not** preaching that He accepts everyone just as they are. This destroys the false pseudo-christian argument that because He ate with publicans and prostitutes we must not preach against sin. Indeed, Christ answers this point

*“For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.” (Mat 21:32)*

Yes, they were publicans and harlots, but then they believed, and gave evidence of that belief. They put off the old man and on the new, making them a new person! And what is it that John said in the way of righteousness that these harlots and publicans believed?

*“In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Mat 3:1-2)*

The exact same message Jesus preached from the beginning of and throughout His ministry! By grace they repented and were welcome in His circle of company, to dine at His table!

This modern, progressive pseudo-christian idea that repentance is not necessary is straight out of Satan's lie book – “ye shall not surely die”. You don't need to change your ways and obey!

As a practical matter, repentance I think requires these things:

1. Acknowledgement of your sin. If you don't acknowledge what it is you are doing is a sin, it doesn't appear possible to me to be in the right frame of mind and heart to actually repent.

2. Sorrow and contrition of heart over what you've done, not only because it hurt someone or brought some ignominy down on yourself, but because it has offended God, and that offense required the blood of Christ to be shed in payment of that offense. Sorrow itself is not repentance, it is a precursor to it.
3. An active seeking of God's grace to grant you repentance. I'll say it again – an **active** requesting it. Just going along expecting He's going to hand repentance out like samples at the grocery store isn't a proper recognition of God's grace or His position as Lord. He is under no obligation to forgive the multitude of sins we commit every day, and if we just go about assuming they are without asking for the imputation of Christ's righteousness and repentance for our offenses, there's no reason to actually expect it to happen.
4. A change. Not just a change in your view of what was done, but a commitment not to return to it again. This can be a difficult thing to discern in a person, and something we should be careful of when judging a matter. This change should be notable, especially for notable sins, but certainly there must be an inward change in your communion with God and a rejection of what it is that sets you to sinning.
5. Fruits. I think this is slightly different than just a change. This is outward manifestation of the change in your heart and mind. Whether others recognize the sin you have repented of or not – for certainly not all sins are public – the fruits of repentance will be manifest because they drive different behavior. Paul speaks of it thusly:

*“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.” (2Co 7:10-11)*

Here you see at least a partial definition of the “fruits meet for repentance” John spoke of. A person who is manifesting these fruits will display some amount of all these things, I believe:

- Carefulness – a noticeably increased carefulness toward their soul manifested in a person's guarding of their tongue and additional withdrawal from worldly pursuits, a greater care not to commit sin;
- Clearing – not a self-righteous clearing of their guilt but a relief of their salvation while simultaneously in that sorrowful state for what they had done; clearly putting away the sin so that they could no longer be looked upon as guilty by those around them;
- Indignation – not just indignation at sin generally which any unregenerate but sensible person has, but at themselves personally and the sin they individually committed;



- Fear – a renewed fear of God, a fear of their tendency to backslide and perhaps not receive that grace from God in the next incident;
- Vehement desire – to do that which is right in the sight of the Lord, to please Him, to live soberly and righteously and eschew the evil they have committed against His righteousness and a vehement desire to be reconciled to God;
- Zeal – a zeal both for duty and against sin, to look to the things of the Spirit and renew their hearts and energies toward those activities that are productive not in the world but in the spirit;
- Revenge – this one might seem strange since it is God's place to exact vengeance, but as a fruit of repentance it speaks to righting the wrongs (where they exist) that sin has wrought against others and doing so with fervency. Correcting the mistakes, paying restitution and bringing the wronged parties into a state where they are confident in the truth of the repentance; it is revenge against oneself as it were.

How these things manifest themselves will look different for each person and occasion, but I believe them to all be there in a legitimate repentance. This isn't a checklist, either, for anyone to go hunting for and calling out someone who has wronged you as not legitimately repentant because you missed item five. These are things we should joyfully see in people who are genuinely repentant of their sins. These are things we should be looking for in ourselves knowing we sin egregiously every single day. Keep that in mind. Repentance isn't for other people to find – it's for each of us every hour of every day.

And what about a person who appears penitent but goes back to a sin they claim to have repented of? How should we view that? Very carefully, I say.

The flesh is weak and the carnal mind enmity against God. We do not all walk with the same strength of faith and the same clarity of understanding, the same zeal or the same maturity. Be careful how you look at a person judging their faith based on your journey and ability to turn away from sin. When Jesus told us to forgive “*until seventy times seven*” (Matt 18:22), it shows us the nature of man. The core point is the forgiveness we should show those who trespass against us, but I think it also shows that a genuine repentance can be backslidden from, if we are to be prepared to forgive a seemingly innumerable number of times.

Friends, preaching repentance isn't an option. It isn't an optional activity or something to take lightly. It is a thing we must humbly ask the Lord to grant us at every opportunity and a thing to work genuinely toward at every opportunity.

*“And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.” (Rom 16:20)*