



LESSON 17

The Necessity of Repentance

“There are many who speak only of the forgiveness of sin, but who say little or nothing about repentance. If there is nevertheless no forgiveness of sins without repentance, so also forgiveness of sins cannot be understood without repentance. Therefore, if forgiveness of sins is preached without repentance, it follows that the people imagine they have already received the forgiveness of sins, and thereby they become cocksure and fearless, which is then greater error and sin than all the error that preceded our time.”

MELANCHTHON

Kirk's Comment

Sometimes, in our attempt to be theologians, we make simple things complicated. Repentance simply means to turn away from sin and turn to God.

QUESTIONS & OBJECTIONS

“What should I say to someone who acknowledges his sins, but says, ‘I just hope God is forgiving?’”

This person could be referred to as “awakened, but not alarmed.” Explain that God is forgiving—but only to those who repent of their sins. Ask him, “If you died right now, where would you go?” If he says, “Hell,” ask if



that concerns him. If it does concern him, ask, “What are you going to do?” Then tell him that God *commands* him to repent and trust the Savior. If it doesn’t concern him, speak of the value of his life, the threat of *eternal* damnation, and the biblical description of hell. Caution him that he doesn’t have the promise of tomorrow, and plead with him to come to his senses.

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Some people insist “repentance” is an old-fashioned word that the world cannot understand. “Sin” is another word that falls into that category. However, we must carefully check our motives for avoiding their use. Do we want to substitute different words to help the world understand, or do we simply want to shake off the reproach that comes with their use? If the world cannot comprehend spiritual words, then we should explain their meanings. Sin is transgression of the Law (1 John 3:4), and repentance means to turn from sin. It is more than contrition (sorrow for sin); to repent means to confess sin and forsake it—to agree with God that it is wrong and to turn and go in the opposite direction. An old soldier once summed up repentance this way: “God said, ‘Attention! About turn! Quick march!’”

It is true that numerous Bible verses speak of the promise of salvation with no mention of repentance. These verses merely tell us to “believe” on Jesus Christ and we shall be saved (Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9). However, the Bible makes it clear that God is holy and man is sinful, and that sin makes a separation between the two (Isaiah 59:1,2). Without repentance from sin, wicked men cannot have fellowship with a holy God. We are dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1) and until we forsake them through repentance, we cannot be made alive in Christ. The Scriptures speak of “repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). We must turn from sin to the Savior. This is why Paul preached “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21).

Jesus said that He came to call “sinners to repentance” (Matthew 9:13). The first public word He preached was “repent” (Matthew 4:17). John the Baptist began his ministry the same way (Matthew 3:2). Jesus told His hearers twice that without repentance, they would perish (Luke 13:3,5).



If belief is all that is necessary for salvation, then the logical conclusion is that one need never repent. However, the Bible tells us that a false convert “believes” and yet is not saved (Luke 8:13); he remains a “worker of iniquity.”

As A. W. Tozer wrote in *The Set of the Sail*, “The fact is that the New Testament message embraces a great deal more than an offer of free pardon. It is a message of pardon, and for that may God be praised; but it is also a message of repentance. It is a message of atonement, but it is also a message of temperance and righteousness and godliness in this present world. It tells us that we must accept a Savior, but it tells us also that we must deny ungodliness and worldly lusts.”

Look at the warning of Scripture: “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (1 John 1:6). The Scriptures also say, “He that covers his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesses and forsakes them [repents] shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). Jesus said that there was joy in heaven over one sinner who “repents” (Luke 15:10). If there is no repentance, there is no joy because there is no salvation.

As Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, he commanded his hearers to repent “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Without repentance, there is no remission of sins; we are still under God’s wrath. Peter further said, “Repent . . . and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). We cannot be converted, or have our sins blotted out, unless we repent. God Himself “commands *all* men *everywhere* [leaving no exceptions] to repent” (Acts 17:30). Peter said a similar thing at Pentecost: “Repent, and be baptized *every one* of you” (Acts 2:38). Scripture says that the Lord is “not willing that any should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Clearly, those who do not repent will perish.

If repentance wasn’t necessary for salvation, why then did Jesus command that *repentance* be preached to all nations (Luke 24:47)? When He sent out His disciples two by two, they “preached that men should repent” (Mark 6:12).

The necessity of repentance underscores the importance of going through the Law with a sinner. If a man doesn’t know what sin is, how can he repent? Any “repentance” would be merely “horizontal repentance.”



He's responding to the Savior because he's lied to men, he's stolen from men, etc. But when David sinned with Bathsheba, he didn't say, "I've sinned against man." He said to God, "Against you, and you only, have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight" (Psalm 51:4). When Joseph was tempted sexually, he said, "How can I do this thing and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). The prodigal son said, "I've sinned against heaven" (Luke 15:21). That's why Paul preached "repentance toward God" (Acts 20:21). When a man doesn't understand that his sin is primarily vertical, he'll merely exercise superficial, experimental, horizontal repentance, and fall away when tribulation, temptation, and persecution come.

QUESTIONS

- 1. Why do you think it would be easier to tell sinners to "believe" than to tell them they need to repent?**
- 2. How did the old soldier sum up repentance?**
- 3. Explain why salvation entails more than merely "believing in Jesus."**
- 4. Who does God command to repent? (See Acts 17:30.)**



5. According to Scripture, what should we be preaching?

PREACHER'S PROGRESS

Tele Marketer: “Hello, Mr. Christian. How are you? I wonder if I could have just one moment of your time. We want to offer you a subscription to *Sports Ill-Lust-rated* with the special ‘Swimsuit Issue.’ If you subscribe, we will give you a chance to win a free trip for two to Hawaii, beer for a year, or a new car. We will also give you, absolutely free of charge, a brand new duffel bag with your favorite sports hero’s picture on it. How would you like to pay for your subscription—with a Visa or MasterCard?”

Christian: “May I ask you a question?”

Tele Marketer: “Certainly, Mr. Christian. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.”

Christian: “Have you kept the Ten Commandments?”

Tele Marketer: “Huh?”

Christian: “Have you kept the Ten Commandments? Have you ever told a lie?”

Tele Marketer: “Yes, Mr. Christian. I have to admit that I have told a few fibs and white lies, but they were in the past.”

Christian: “What does that make you?”

Tele Marketer: “It doesn’t make me anything.”

Christian: “If I told a lie, what would I be called?”

Tele Marketer: “A liar.”

Christian: “So what are you?”

Tele Marketer: “A liar. But that was in the past.”



Christian: “Everything was in the past. Have you ever stolen something, even if it’s small?”

Tele Marketer: “Yes, sir.”

Christian: “What does that make you?”

Tele Marketer: “A thief.”

Christian: “Jesus said that if you look with lust, you commit adultery in your heart. Have you ever looked with lust?”

Tele Marketer: “Many times . . .”

Christian: “If God were to judge you by the Ten Commandments on Judgment Day, would you be innocent or guilty?”

Tele Marketer: “Guilty.”

Christian: “Would you go to heaven or hell?”

Tele Marketer: “Hell . . .”

Telemarketers are a good way for you to practice what you preach. You don’t have to look them in the eye. You can’t be injured by them. The worst thing they can do is hang up in your ear. If that happens, you can rejoice that they were convicted enough to do so. You not only had the privilege of planting the seed of God’s Word in the heart of a stranger, but you proved yourself to be faithful to the Lord, you conquered the fear of man, and now you can rejoice that you were rejected for the sake of righteousness. If they hang up, spend a moment in prayer for them.

If they are open to hearing more, take them through the cross, repentance, and faith. Ask if they have a Bible at home, encourage them to read it daily, and then thank them for listening to you.

Memory Verse

“Repent therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”

ACTS 3:19

Last Words

Phillip III, King of France:

“What an account I shall have to give to God! How I should like to live otherwise than I have lived.”