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## **“Changing Direction”**

### The Doctrine of Repentance

#### Various Passages

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**R**epentance is an interesting subject because there are some significant differences in how the word is used. Does repent mean to feel sorry about actions? Do we have to repent to be saved, or being saved do we repent, or in some way is repentance an integral part of God’s work in bringing about salvation? Hopefully we will answer some of these questions this morning.

As is always the case this doctrinal study is simply intended to be an overview of the subject, and hopefully it will challenge you to explore the topic further. I also hope that these short studies are of some help as you have the opportunity to present the message of salvation to those the Lord places in your life.

As in the previous doctrinal studies, the outline is drawn primarily from Through the Bible in One Year<sup>1</sup>.

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Stringfellow speaks to one use of the word repentance that sometimes causes problems for people, and that is the repentance of God. I don’t intend to deal with that here because we have spent significant time on it in other studies. And, since we can understand repent to mean to change direction, we can remember God has chosen at times to change direction as a result of changed behaviours of men. This doesn’t mean God moves from His standards or will for us, but He does change the method by which He deals with us.

**“If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them” (Jeremiah 18:10).**

The full passage in the NIV says:

**“Then the word of the LORD came to me: “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?” declares the LORD. “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. 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. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it. and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it” (Jeremiah 18:5-10).**

This is a change in direction, but in God’s case not intent.

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<sup>1</sup>Stringfellow, Alan B., ed., Through the Bible in One Year, Vol. 3, Great Truths of the Bible, Copyright © 1981 by Virgil W. Hensley, Inc., Publisher, Tulsa, OK, p. 111-116.

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**I Introduction:** Probably the place to start is to consider what repentance means. At its simplest, to repent is an action, it is changing direction, whether in life, or in specific behaviours. It isn't about feeling bad for doing something wrong or sinning.

**1. Definition:** The NIV Dictionary defines it this way:

*“In the NT repentance and faith are the two sides of one coin (Acts 20:21). They are a response to grace. Jesus preached the need for the Jews to repent (Matt 4:17), and required his apostles/disciples to preach repentance to Jews and Gentiles (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 17:30). Repentance is a profound change of mind involving the changing of the direction of life. The positive side of repentance is conversion, the actual turning to God or Christ for grace.”*<sup>2</sup>

***“I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:21).***

What is the result of true repentance? It is turning to God, accepting Christ, and the forgiveness of sin. We are forgiven, not because we have recognized all our sin, just that we are sinners. But because we have accepted Christ's payment for sin we are forgiven. The second kind of repentance, a changed life, is the product of salvation, not the basis of it. As Peter notes:

***“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” (Acts 2:38).***

Clearly when we are talking about repentance in the work of salvation, the change is in our relationship to God, at the empowering and calling of the Holy Spirit. We turn from living life on our terms and realize we need to live it on God's terms. This is the struggle of the lost. They want God to come to them on their terms, not His. In this context we are not necessarily speaking so much about sin as we are about the end of our rebellion against God and running away from Him.

**2. The Core of Truth:** Let me finish here by quoting Stringfellow and make a some observations on his words.

*“Repentance and faith are the two necessities for conversion. Repentance is turning from self, faith is turning to God; repentance looks within, faith looks above; repentance sees our turmoil, faith sees our Saviour.*

*Repentance is a three fold action:*

- *in the **understanding**—knowledge of sin;*
- *in the **feelings**—pain and grief;*
- *in the **will**—a change of mind (metanoia) and a turning around. It is a realization of self, the despair of guilt, a renouncing of self.”*<sup>3</sup>

It is important again to note when we are talking about salvation and repentance, the focus is on our relationship to God, not a focus on specific sins. And, we must never fall into the trap

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas, J. D. and Merrill C. Tenney, editors, NIV Bible Dictionary, Zondervan Interactive Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990

<sup>3</sup> Stringfellow, p. 111.

of thinking this is about man. It is about God and the working of the Holy Spirit. No one is capable of choosing God, much less repenting without the work of the Spirit. Harris notes, speaking of 2 Corinthians 7:10:

***“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”***

*“Verse 10 describes two ways of reacting to pain or sorrow. God’s way (“godly sorrow” or sorrow “as God intended,” kata theon , vv.9, 10, 11) invariably produces a change of heart and this repentance “leads to salvation” and therefore gives no cause for regret. Sorrow borne in a worldly way (tou kosmou ), on the other hand, does not lead to repentance but has the deadly effect of producing resentment or bitterness. What makes suffering remedial is not the actual experience of it but the reaction to it; a “godly” or positive reaction brings blessing, a “worldly” or negative reaction causes harm.”<sup>4</sup>*

**II The Great Truth:** The repentance of man is the theme I want to focus on, now that we have discussed the concept of repentance and salvation. So, first I think I’ll turn to Stringfellow again.

**1. The Meaning of Repentance:** Here we will consider three definitions.

A. *The verb “metamelomai” means, “regret, being annoyed with the results of sin, remorse” this is the word used by Judas Iscariot (Matthew 27:3). Notice the words, “when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself.” The word carries no thought for change of mind. Judas was filled with remorse. This is not a saving repentance.*

B. *The usual verb is “metanoeo” meaning to “change one’s mind.”*

C. *The corresponding noun is “metanoia” meaning “change of mind in respect to sin.”<sup>5</sup>*

So, when discussing repentance in relationship to salvation, we are talking about changing one’s mind about God, one’s direction and moving towards Him. The result of being saved then will lead to a changing one’s direction in regards to behavior which is in respect to sin.

We find repentance preached in the New Testament, first by John the Baptizer and next by Jesus, and then by the apostles.

**2. John the Baptizer:** John was the last of the Old Testament prophets and much of his ministry was concerned with the call to repentance.

His coming was foretold by the prophet Isaiah as the precursor to the Messiah, and is in the type of Elijah, as there will be at Christ second coming.

***“A voice of one calling: “In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”” (Isaiah 40:3-5).***

<sup>4</sup> Harris, Murray J., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, “2 Corinthians,” Zondervan Interactive Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990

<sup>5</sup> Stringfellow, p. 113.

He fulfilled his responsibility as he announced the arrival of Jesus and called the Jews to repentance.

***“Now this was John’s testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, “I am not the Christ.”***

***They asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?”***

***He said, “I am not.”***

***“Are you the Prophet?”***

***He answered, “No.”***

***Finally they said, “Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”***

***John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”” (John 1:19-23).***

***“... and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”” (Matthew 3:2).***

Speaking to the Matthew passage notes:

*“John’s preaching had two elements. The first was a call to repent. Though the verb metanoeo is often explained etymologically as “to change one’s mind,” or popularly as “to be sorry for something,” neither rendering is adequate. In classical Greek the verb could refer to a purely intellectual change of mind. But the NT usage has been influenced by the Hebrew verbs naham (“to be sorry for one’s actions”) and sub (“to turn around to new actions”). The latter is common in the prophets’ call to the people to return to the covenant with Yahweh (cf. DNTT 1:357-59; Turner, Christian Words, pp. 374-77). What is meant is not a merely intellectual change of mind or mere grief, still less doing penance (cf. Notes), but a radical transformation of the entire person, a fundamental turnaround involving mind and action and including overtones of grief, which results in “fruit in keeping with repentance.” Of course, all this assumes that man’s actions are fundamentally off course and need radical change. John applies this repentance to the religious leaders of his day (3:7-8) with particular vehemence.”*

**3. Jesus:** He too came bring a message of repentance, because He was bringing in God’s kingdom. And here, the call to repentance was a call to turn from self, and to turn to God. But Christ came as Israel’s Messiah, calling for a national repentance. But national repentance requires individual repentance.

***“From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”” (Matthew 4:17).***

So He called men to repent

***“But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”” (Matthew 9:13).***

And, He pointed men to the Old Testament to remind them of God’s past calls to repentance.

***“The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here” (Matthew 12:41).***

- 4. The Apostles:** With the apostles came the a renewed call to repentance, to turn from self to God, but now the basis for that turning was clear, it was in the power of the Holy Spirit through the shed blood of Christ.

**Peter:** *“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.” ... “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” ... “Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart” (Acts 2:38, 3:19, 8:22).*

**Paul:** *“In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.” ... “I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.” ... “for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable” (Acts 17:30, 20:21, 11:29).*

So, the turning, repentance, is towards God. It is grounded in faith in Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to do this. So, again, repentance isn’t about feeling bad about our sin, it is changing the direction of our lives. And there is evidence of biblical repentance.

**III The Evidence of Repentance:** There are a number examples of repentance, including the prodigal son, Thomas, Paul, the Philippian jailer, etc.

- 1. The Prodigal Son:** The most obvious illustration of biblical repentance is the story of the Prodigal son. While the son went to the pig pens, he remained a son. And we see the result of repentance in his turning from the pens and returning home to the father. (see Luke 15:11-32).
- 2. Thomas:** Even for believers there is an ongoing need to repent. What was it that Thomas needed to repent of? He lack of belief in the resurrected Jesus.

*“Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”*

*But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”*

*A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”*

*Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”*

*Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:24-29).*

- 3. Paul:** The most obvious example is Paul. There is good reason to believe that he thought he was going God’s work in persecuting the early church. But, when Christ came to him, he repented, changed direction and became the greatest spokesman for the church. (see Acts 9:1-18).

*“As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.” ... ““Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”” (Acts 9:3, 5-6).*

**III The Incentives to Repentance:** Keep in mind while it is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to be able to repent, there are nevertheless biblical incentives provided to repent. Repentance is a reasonable and rational choice. It is this we need to prayerfully present to the lost. The argument won't save anyone, but the Holy Spirit uses the Word to save.

- 1. The Consequences of Sin:** There is nothing wrong with wanting to escape the eternal consequences of sin. “Scaring the Hell” out of someone is appropriate, keeping in mind that it's the power of the Holy Spirit Who does the work.

And what is the consequence—eternal death, judgment, damnation. This is the state all find themselves in. Wanting to avoid this is good.

*“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).*

And it is Jesus who through His work provides the remedy.

*“... unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13:3).*

But the Christian life is much more than escaping Hell, though that would be sufficient because it is provided by Christ. It is much more. It is experiencing the goodness of God and enjoying a personal relationship with Him.

- 2. The Goodness of God:** The most obvious example of God's goodness, is the provision of our salvation, Can you think of any better incentive to repent?

*“Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?” (Romans 2:4).*

*“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).*

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).*

**IV Summary:** The following excerpts from B. H. Dement summarize the Doctrine.

*“The change wrought in repentance is so deep and radical as to affect the whole spiritual nature and involve the entire personality, including the intellect, the emotions, and the will.*

- 1. Intellect:** Repentance is that change of a sinner's mind that leads him or her to turn from evil ways and live. Intellectually, human beings must apprehend sin as unutterably heinous, the divine law as perfect and binding, and themselves as falling short of the requirements of a holy God. ...

2. **Emotions:** *It is possible to have a knowledge of sin without abhorring it as something that dishonors God and ruins humanity. ... A change in emotional attitude is necessarily involved with genuine repentance. ... While sorrow for sin is not the equivalent of repentance, it may be a powerful impulse to a genuine turning from sin. ... True repentance involves not only a conviction of personal sinfulness, but also an earnest appeal to God to forgive according to His mercy.*
3. **Will:** *... The demand for repentance clearly implies human free will and individual responsibility, but it is equally clear that God is represented as taking the initiative in repentance. This **apparent** paradox reflects the mysterious relationship between human and divine personalities.”<sup>6</sup>*

**V Conclusion:** So does one have to repent to be saved? If we understand the word correctly, then the answer is of course. Stringfellow sees this as our part of the work of salvation. But, clearly just as we are incapable of accepting salvation, we are incapable of repenting, turning towards God and away from self.

It is the Holy Spirit Who draws the heart of the lost to be open to the message of the Gospel, Who provides the faith necessary to accept Christ’s gift of salvation, and empowers repentance, the turning from self and rebellion to God and obedience.

Repenting of one’s sin then is a product of the work of the Holy Spirit and Christ’s work on the Cross. Repentance must occur if one is saved, because salvation means accepting God. As believers we no longer practice sin, and when we do experience godly sorrow which cause ongoing repentance, turning away from sin and choosing obedience.

*“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

*If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.*

*Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.*

*In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.*

*What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be*

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<sup>6</sup> Dement, B. H., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Volume Four, “Repent,” William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1988, p. 136-137.

*to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*

*I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*~ Romans 6:1-23*

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**“By Grace”**  
The Doctrine of Salvation

**Various Passages**

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**I Introduction:**

*(Ephesians 4:11-12; 2:8-9)*

**II The Great Truth:**

**1. Salvation was conceived in the Mind of God:**

*(Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20; Romans 8:29; also see Titus 1:2)*

**2. Salvation—the Grace of God:**

*(John 1:14; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 2:11; Romans 5:8)*

**III Salvation Before and After the Cross:**

**1. Salvation Before the Cross:**

*(Hebrews 9:15; Romans 3:25; Genesis 3:15; 22:8)*

**2. Salvation After the Cross:**

*(Hebrews 10:13-14; John 1:29; Colossians 2:14)*

**IV The Price Paid for Salvation:**

**1. Christ Had to Die to Provide Salvation:**

*(Romans 8:11; John 3:16)*

**2. Christ Suffered for the Sins of the World, Our Sins:**

*(1 Peter 3:18; Hebrews 9:22; Matthew 26:28)*

## **V Salvation for the Penalty of Sin:**

- 1. Christ Saves From the Guilt and Penalty of Sin:**  
*(2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 4:31-32)*
- 2. Christ Will Save All Who Will Come to Him:**  
*(2 Peter 3:9)*

## **VI Salvation From the Power of Sin:**

- 1. Christ Ever Lives to Make Intercession For Us:**  
*(Romans 6:14; Hebrews 9:25; 1 John 2:1)*
- 2. The Christian Can Live a Victorious Life:**  
*(Romans 8:1-3; Romans 8:26-27; 1 John 5:20; see Romans 7:15-25)*

## **VII Salvation From the Presence of Sin:**

- 1. Jesus Shall Return to Take the Redeemed from the Presence of Sin:**  
*(Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 1:4-5)*
- 2. God Sees Christians as They Shall Be:**  
*(1 John 3:1-2)*

## **VIII Salvation is the Free Gift of God:**

*(Ephesians 2:8-9).*

- 1. How Can a Person be Saved?:**  
*(1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Romans 3:23; 6:23; Romans 10:8-11)*
- 2. How Can a Person Live a Christian Life?:**  
*(John 1:12; 1 John 1:9; 5:13)*