

# The Neglected Doctrine of Repentance

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Galatians 5:16-25 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

**16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

**25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.**

Now, to kick things of this morning, you might have seen the title of Today's sermon "The Neglected Doctrine of Repentance", and be wondering why we opened with this passage in Galatians. After all, the terms "repent", "repentance", nor even "confess" are not to found in any portion of the passage that Brother Vern just read to you. Now I admit, it might not be obvious at first, but please be patient with me as we work together in the Scriptures for the next hour or so ... However, I will give you a hint – the key Scripture in this passage related to our topic this morning is found in verses 24-25:

**Galatians 5:24 "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."**

What I want to demonstrate this morning is that the Truth found in this passage about repentance is found throughout Scripture, indeed dozens of times with the actual words "repent" or "repentance", but literally hundreds of other times in context – both directly and indirectly. My genuine hope is that when you leave here today, you will be just a little more equipped to understand **repentance** both in you own walk with God – which we call our Sanctification, and to be able to describe and demonstrate it to others – which we call our Witness.

Before we get started, it is important to have a little background on the Book of Galatians. For anyone who has studied this wonderful epistle at all, they will remember that the theme of the book is justification by faith, embodied in of the “Solas” of Biblical Christianity we have listed on the back wall – “Sola Fide” – that salvation and reconciliation to God is by Faith Alone. In fact, in several respects, the Book of Galatians can be considered a “mini” version of the Book of Romans. Many important doctrinal themes are notably similar in both books; such as the inability of the Law to justify, the believer's deadness to the Law, Abraham's salvation by faith, the believer's crucifixion with and baptism into Christ, the believer's adoption as sons of God, and that love fulfills the Law.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia to counter false Judaizers who were heretically undermining the central gospel message of salvation by faith. They were attempting to deceive those early Christians in Galatia that believers must add submission to the Mosaic Law to their faith in order to be saved. This was such an urgent matter to Paul, that unlike all his other letters in the canon of Scripture, he did not have any commendation in this letter to the Galatians. There is a lot more we could say about this Book, but it is time to get back to our subject for today.

After defending justification by faith and sternly rebuking the Galatians for accepting the false doctrine of the Judaizers for over 4 chapters, we find Paul turning his concern to another heresy that could be a new risk to the Galatians: Antinomianism, which simply stated simply means that after “salvation”, it does not matter how a believer lives his or her life – by the way, a heresy that sadly remains alive and well today. So we can pick up this new concern from Paul in just a couple of verses ahead of where Brother Vern started us this morning:

**Galatians 5:13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”**

Paul was absolutely marvelous at anticipating questions. And this then brings us to the topic of repentance here in Chapter 5. If we are freed from the Law, from what are we to repent, and how now shall we live our lives? Of course, Paul answers that question in verses 16-25 which we just read together, but I want to take a closer look at this topic with y'all this morning.

So first of all, let's establish a definition of repentance, OK? I want to open by reading you the introduction to a wonderful little resource on the topic by Pastor Jeremy Walker, entitled “*What is Repentance*”, and available at [www.heritagebooks.org](http://www.heritagebooks.org):

**Repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner, out of true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.**

I am constantly amazed at the Reformer's ability to succinctly, yet profoundly, define their terms, and these British authors have done an excellent job with the biblical essence of repentance.

Now that we have a basic understanding of what repentance is, let's turn to why it is so important to us today. Sadly, this deep meaning of the word repentance has been twisted in recent years, especially in the professing modern church in America, to the point that its biblical meaning is now obscured in the minds of many – as was reflected in that opening from Brother Walker's pamphlet. However, the idea that genuine repentance could result in anything but a total, permanent, ongoing change of life is completely foreign to Scripture.

Having said that, what does the Bible teach about the relationship between salvation and repentance? First, it teaches that repentance is essential to salvation. One cannot truly believe unless he repents, and one cannot truly repent unless he believes. Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin (but they are not equivalent terms). Perhaps 2 Timothy 2:25 best sums up the relationship between repentance and saving faith when it speaks of "repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (see also Acts 20:21).

Also, despite what is being widely taught today, affirming that repentance and acknowledgment of Jesus' lordship are necessary to salvation does not "add" anything to the requirement of faith for salvation. It is not "faith plus repentance" that saves, but rather a **repentant faith**. You could just as accurately describe it as **faithful repentance**. This is an important point – The notion that salvation is possible apart from a genuine, heartfelt repentance, which includes a deep hatred of sin, is a relatively new one, neither believed nor taught in the Church until some have erred in the twentieth century.

One of the clearest elements of the call to salvation on the pages of Scripture is the issue of repentance. As with all importance doctrines, the doctrine of repentance begins in the OT and is made clearer in the NT. Turn, if you will, to the fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, Isaiah 55, really just a launch point by way of reminder. Isaiah 55 verses 6 and 7, and here we have a call – a command really – to salvation that incorporates repentance, without using the word itself. "Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return to the Lord and He will have compassion on him and to our God for He will abundantly pardon."

Note that seeking the Lord is important, calling upon Him is critical, but so is forsaking wicked ways and unrighteous thoughts. It is impossible to talk about seeking the Lord without talking about turning from sin. It is impossible to talk about turning to the Lord without turning away from iniquity and wickedness. Clearly this is an essential that is carried forth to the gospel message.

Let me help you a little bit with that. Go to the New Testament, let's look at Matthew chapter 3, and I want to give you kind of a fast look at critical Scriptures just to plant in your mind the importance of this doctrine. John the Baptist came in Matthew 3 verse 1, preaching. And this is what he preached, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent. And this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet saying, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight.'" If you're going to receive the Lord and the salvation He brings, you're going to have to straighten out. You're going to have to make a way for the Lord. We looked at this passage with Pastor Blair several years ago now as it's indicated from the lips of John the Baptist in Luke chapter 3 where he quotes the extended portion of Isaiah 40 verses 3 and 4 about lifting up the low places, lowering the high places, straightening the crooked places and cleaning the rough places. There is some heart work to be done in order to enter the Kingdom. That was the message of John the Baptist. Down in verse 8 he then adds, "Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance." In other words – Demonstrate that your repentance is real.

In the fourth chapter of Matthew Jesus began to preach and say, just as John had said, "Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." Salvation is near. We find this note sounded repeatedly in the ministry of our Lord, as well. In the ninth chapter of Matthew verse 12, Jesus said, "It's not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means. I desire compassion and not sacrifice. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." And the other gospels add, "To repentance." He has come to call sinners to repentance, and that will show up in the other gospels.

Just to parallel that, Mark 1:14, again the emphasis is clearly John preaching and then John being taken into custody in Mark 1:14, Jesus comes into Galilee preaching the gospel of God, the good news from heaven, the good news of God. What is it? "The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel." Repent and believe in the gospel. The modern professing church in America today talks a lot about believing, but they don't talk much about repentance. But friends, this is absolutely critical. In the sixth chapter of Mark and the twelfth verse, here we find the Twelve, the Apostles sent out to preach and they went out, Mark 6:12, and preached that men should repent. That, of course, is the mandate.

And remember Luke, if you will, for just a moment. Luke 5:31 and 32, because this same emphasis is made there. In Luke 5:31 Jesus said, "It's not those who are well who need a physician, those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners...and here it comes...to repentance." John called people to repent. Jesus called people to repent. The Apostles called people to repent.

Now let's move to 13 in Luke, a familiar book to us now because we've been dealing with it for some 9 years. In Luke 13 do you remember in verse 3? "I tell you no, unless you repent you will all likewise

perish." Luke 13:5, "I tell you no, unless you repent you will all likewise perish." There is no salvation apart from repentance. Go to the fifteenth chapter and again verse 10, Luke 15:10, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." The sixteenth chapter, the thirtieth verse, "No, Father Abraham, if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent. But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.'" And that, of course, was in the fascinating story about Lazarus in Abraham's bosom and the rich man shut out. But the issue was always about repentance. Now go to the end of Luke's gospel and we'll give you previews of what we someday soon we plan learn. Luke 24, starting at verse 46, "It is written that Christ should suffer, rise again from the dead again the third day." That's the gospel. "And that repentance for forgiveness of sin should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem."

So just from that brief tour through the gospel record, what are we supposed to proclaim, brothers and sisters? **Repentance**...repentance.

John MacArthur shares the following account that makes me believe that the people Jeremy Walker was talking about a few minutes ago were from Russia or somewhere else in the Eastern Block of Europe: Listen to John share this story:

"It's been fascinating to me through the years in visiting countries in former Communist Russia to meet the believers there and to come to some understanding of their unique Christian vocabulary. And one of the things they say when they talk about their salvation is, "I repented...I repented." They don't say, "I was saved, I was born again." They say, "I repented. I repented when I was such-and-such an age, I repented when I heard this, I repented...the preachers say, 'Do any of you desire to repent? Please come forward and repent.'" First time I was ever there, first time I preached, it was fascinating. I preached a rather prolonged sermon in Kiev in the Ukraine and the place was packed, the people were outside looking through the window and it was very cold but they stood there for hours. It was soon after the Freedoms had come, there was tremendous interest in the gospel and the pastor after I was finished preaching said, "Pull it together and call for people to repent and then I'll come up and we'll invite people to repent." And he did. He came up after I had preached. I think it was 11:30 in the morning by the time I had finished, and he said, "If you desire to repent, please come to the front." I wasn't sure what that meant but people began coming to the front. When they came to the front, the pastor handed them a microphone and said, "Repent." That's right, so they took the microphone and they repented publicly. And as I remember it, and I think it's pretty accurate, after each person repented, there was rejoicing and they sang a verse of a hymn and that went on till 1:30, two hours of people repenting because they understand what the Bible means by what the Bible says. It's about repentance."

So let's move on from the Gospels and Look at the book of Acts chapter 2 verse 38. Peter said to them...as a reminder we are now post-resurrection, post-ascension, the gospel is now in the hands of the Apostles and the believers. Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Chapter 3 verse 19, "Repent, therefore, and return that your sins may be wiped away in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." The message is obviously going to be the same, the same Holy Spirit, the same gospel, the same call to repentance. You find it even in chapter 11:18 where they are somewhat surprised that God has granted to the Gentiles, listen, the "repentance that leads to life". Spiritual life comes by way of turning from sin, as well as turning to God. And in chapter 17 Paul preaching that wonderful sermon in the midst of the Areopagus to the Athenians in verse 30, says, "God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent in view of the day of judgment." Again the message very clearly is a message of repentance.

And then in one final one in the book of Acts, Acts 20:20 Paul says he taught publicly and from house to house, and what did he teach? "Solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, these are not the only references, by the way, in the book of Acts to repentance, but sufficient, I think for our time this morning.

When you come in to the book of Romans, there is a strong emphasis on repentance by the Apostle Paul. For example, chapter 2 verse 4, "Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" In fact, you could even refer to salvation as repentance, that's the way they do it, as was stated earlier, among Russian believers and others. And you remember the words of Peter in 2 Peter 3:9, "God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

By now, I hope that I have thoroughly convinced you to say repentance is a critical matter. It is an essential part of the saving work of God. It is a call for a turning from sin. If we were to just pull together the basic linguistic for the Greek **metanoia**, which at its basic form means to change the mind, and some of the theological things that have been used to describe the meaning of that word, this is what you would come up with. Here's a more detailed understanding of what repentance means. It is by all those who define both the word and its theological meaning, a radical turning, a radical conversion, a transformation of nature, a definitive turning from evil, a resolute turning from evil toward God, a commitment to move from unrighteousness to righteousness, from disobedience to obedience. And this conversion is not just one-and-done, not just raising your hand in one church service and punching your ticket into heaven – no true repentance is **once for all time**. There can be, says one writer, no going back, only advance in responsible movement along the way now taken. It is a life-altering event, this repentance. It affects the whole man. First and basically it affects the center of

personal life, then logically from the center it begins to impact all the conduct and the thought life, all situations, all actions. The whole proclamation of Jesus then is a proclamation of a once-for-all, complete, unconditional turning from sin to God...unconditional from all that is against God to all that honors Him. It is not just turning from what we could say is a downright wickedness, it is even turning from those things that are not God-honoring. As we just sang together this morning – It is total surrender. It is total commitment to the will of God and the Word of God. It embraces the whole life of a person. One writer says it embraces the whole walk of the new man who is claimed by the divine Lordship. It carries with it the founding of a new personal relation between a man and God. It awakens joyous obedience for a life lived according to God's will.

Sometimes it is helpful to contrast a definition by what it *is not*. Repentance is not just to change your mind about who Jesus is. It is not just to change your mind about your circumstances and decide to try something else. It is a whole new life that emerges out of self-denial. It is to deny yourself and your sin and to commit yourself unreservedly to Christ. Its importance, unless you repent, Jesus said, you'll perish...you'll perish. But you may have noticed for years this is not a fashionable thing to preach because it's not easily accepted. It doesn't tend to grow the numbers in the pews. Again going back, here's an interesting quote from Dr. Henry Ironsides in 1937 and Ironsides noted that the biblical doctrine of repentance was being diluted by those who wish to exclude it from the gospel message. Nothing new. This is what Ironsides wrote, he wrote a book in '37 called *Except You Repent*, he said this, "The Doctrine of Repentance is the missing note in many otherwise orthodox and fundamentally sound circles today." And that could be repeated today – but sadly the list of omissions has grown. There is always going to be a battle for the true gospel, to hold the standard where God has established the standard in the Scriptures and repentance is going to be a point of that fight. Ironsides went on to speak of professed preachers of grace who like the antinomians of old decry the necessity of repentance, lest it seem to invalidate the freedom of grace. Some people think that if you call people to repent, as we are talking about this morning, if you call them to struggle and to agonize in the battle for their souls with God, if you call them to do that, somehow this works. In fact, Ironside even said, "This unwillingness to preach repentance is an incipient easy-believism."

...So what's the point? That this problem is not new, it's old. In fact it's very old, the history of the church records the testimony of God's leaders at the very outset. Go back to 150, go back to the second recorded letter of Clement, 150 A.D., all right? This would be 50 years or more, or 55 years after John wrote the Revelation (according to many) and the Canon was closed. He said this, "Let us not merely call Him Lord, for that will not save us, for He says, 'Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will be saved, but he who does what is right.' Thus, brothers, let us acknowledge Him by our actions. This world and the world to come are two enemies, this one means adultery, corruption, avarice and deceit, while the other gives them up. We cannot then be friends of both. To get the one,

you must give up the other." That's what repentance is. It is essentially saying to adultery, corruption, avarice and deceit, I give you up. That was then the battle and it's always been.

Now let's jump somewhere in between. How about Martin Luther? How about Martin Luther, 1500's? Ninety-Five Thesis he puts on the door of the church at Wittenberg, 1517, 499 years ago as we just celebrated the Reformation, of the Ninety-Five Thesis, here are the very first three. Number one, this is what he said the Bible demanded. "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ in saying repent meant the whole life of the faithful to be an act of repentance." The second of the Ninety-five, "This saying cannot be understood of a sacrament of Penance, i.e., of confession and absolution which is administered by the priesthood, that is to say you can't grant somebody absolution from their sin instead of them repenting." And, of course, you know the Indulgences and the Absolutions were the horrific thing that caused the whole Protestant Reformation, that people were so beleaguered by having to pay money to buy Indulgences and to go through all of these rituals and routines which impoverished them in order to purchase Penance as a substitute for repentance and be delivered from their sin. The abuses of the system upon them made them ripe for a revolution and all Martin Luther had to do was show up and articulate what the people felt and it happened.

Third of the Ninety-Five, "Yet He does not mean interior repentance only, nay, interior repentance is void if it does not produce different kinds of mortification of the flesh." In other words, it better show up in a broken and a contrite heart and in a life where the flesh is being killed. So Luther launches the Reformation on the doctrine of true heartfelt, life-changing repentance. He says the whole life of the faithful is an act of repentance. You stop going the direction you're going, you turn, you go completely away from sin toward God. As Reformed theology began to be refined and show up in creedal form, you have 1674, the Westminster Shorter Catechism and it asks... "What is repentance unto life?" The answer came as we read it a few minutes ago ...It went on to say, "Repentance unto life doth chiefly consist in two things. One, in turning from sin and forsaking it; two, in turning to God." And you can't have one without the other. You can just call people to believe in Jesus, pray a prayer, invite Jesus into their heart unless there's a clear understanding that they are turning from sin.

Another question or two come out of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Question number 15 says, "What is that turning from sin which is part of true repentance?" And the answer comes, "The turning from sin which is part of true repentance doth consist in two things: one, in a turning from all gross sins in regard of our course and conversation; two, in a turning from all other sins in regard of our hearts and affections." It touches everything.

And then question number 16 in the catechism asks, "Do such as truly repent of sin never return again unto the practice of the same sins which they have repented of?" Answer, "One, such as truly repented sin do never return to the practice of it so as to live in a course of sin as they did before, and

where any after repentance do return unto a course of sin, it is an evident sign that their repentance was not of the right kind. Two, some have truly repented of their sins although they may be overtaken and surprised by temptations so as to fall into the commission of the same sins which they have repented of, yet they do not lie in them but get up again and with bitter grief bewail them and turn again unto the Lord."

That is great theology hammered out from profound understanding of Scripture by great and gifted men in the Westminster Catechism. Great British Puritan, Thomas Goodwin, wrote, "Where mourning for offending God is lacking, there is no sign of any good will wrought in the heart to God, nor of love to Him without which God will never accept a man." Did you get that? Where mourning...m-o-u-r-n-i-n-g, for offending God is lacking, there's no sign of any good will yet wrought in the heart toward God. He went on to say, "Else there is no hope of amendment. God will not pardon till He sees hopes of amendment, until He sees the sinner longing to change. Now until a man confess his sin and that with bitterness, it is a sign he still loves it. While he hides it, spares it and forsakes it not, it is still sweet in his mouth and therefore until he confess it and mourn for it, it is a sign it is not bitter to him, so he will not forsake it. A man will never leave sin until he finds bitterness in it and if so, he will be in bitterness for it and godly sorrow will work repentance."

Moving a little later in history from Thomas Goodwin, we come to Charles H. Spurgeon. He says it as strongly and as usual as well as can be said (he's one of my favorites). Listen to what Spurgeon said:

"There must be a true and actual abandonment of sin and a turning unto righteousness in a real act and deed in everyday life. Repentance, to be sure, must be entire. How many will say, 'Sir, I will renounce this sin and the other but there are certain darling lusts which I must keep and hold.' O Sirs, in God's name let me tell you, it is not the giving up of one sin nor 50 sins which is true repentance, it is the complete renunciation of every sin. If thou doest harbor one of those accursed vipers in thy heart and dost give up every other, that one lust like one leak in a ship will sink your soul. Think it not sufficient to give up thy outward vices, fancy it not enough to cut off the more corrupt sins of thy life, it is all or none that God demands. Repent, says He, and when He bids you repent He means repent of all thy sins otherwise He can never accept thy repentance is real or genuine. All sin must be given up or else you shall never have Christ, all transgression must be renounced or else the gates of heaven must be barred against you. Let us remember then that for repentance to be sincere, it must be entire repentance."

And he closes with these words, "True repentance is a turning of the heart, as well as the life. It is the giving up of the whole soul to God to be His forever and ever. It is the renunciation of the sins of the heart as well as the crimes of the life," end quote.

See, everybody understood this the same way. The great stream of historic Christian faith has always understood it. It was uniformly understood, actually, until the last century, when you read things, for example, in the theology of Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder of Dallas Seminary who errantly listed repentance as, quote: "One of the more common features of human responsibility which are too often erroneously added to the one requirement of faith." So he erroneously himself stated that repentance is a erroneously added element to faith. Likewise, if you happen to have a copy of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Ryrie Study Bible, you will find a statement in the back on repentance and it says, "Repentance is a false addition to faith." How can they say that? After what we have learned already this morning, How can anyone possibly draw that conclusion from Scripture?

From His first message to His last, the Savior's theme was calling sinners to turn from their sin in repentance and turn to God in faith.

It wasn't simply about getting a new perspective on themselves, on their life. It wasn't about getting a new perspective on Christ. It was about turning from sin to follow Him. That's why, as I quoted earlier, Luke 24:47 says, "You have to go throughout the whole world and preach repentance." That's the great commission, preach repentance, calling for people to turn from sin. Let's look at that group of people that Jesus never had anything good to say about. It is clear that the Pharisees believed in God. The Pharisees even longed to know God, to serve God. But they were utterly unwilling to repent. The rich young ruler wanted eternal life, but he was not willing to repent. So, repentance can never be redefined in such a way as to strip it of its moral imperative.

Now let's just reconsider a couple of things about repentance. We just set the stage there. Number one, in expounding a biblical definition to this great doctrine, we have to understand that repentance is an element within saving faith. It is an essential element within saving faith. As we discussed in the opening, it is not another word for believing. And sadly today there are a lot of folks who would like us to think it's just another word for believing. To say to someone to repent simply means to stop **not** believing and start believing -- that it's really another word for faith. As we saw, while it is not actually another word for faith, the two are complimentary parts of the same reality – two side of the same coin. The Greek word *metanoia* literally means to think after or a change of mind. But it's not just a change of mind, as we have already seen, the Greek tense and biblical meaning is a lot more than the word itself. It always in its usage in the New Testament embodies far more than just changing your mind, it is a change of everything in your life without turning back, everything. It really is a conversion, a hundred and eighty degrees. Jesus is calling for a repudiation of the old, that's why He said, "Deny yourself." A complete repudiation of the old sinful life, turning away from sin and turning toward God. In 1 Thessalonians 1:9, here Paul is defining the true salvation of the Thessalonian believers and in verse 9 he says, "You turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven." You turned to God, you turned from idols, you turned from evil, you turned in order to

stop serving sin and start serving God. So it is then, first of all, an element within saving faith, but it's not just the same as faith. It's a component of faith because in order to truly turn to God in faith you have to turn from sin or the turning is a sham.

Secondly, it is a redirection of the will. In that I want to say this, look there are some people who have the idea that repentance is feeling sorry. Okay? It's about feeling bad. Sometimes you hear about a person who fell into terrible sin and somebody will say, "But, you know, they're very repentant." How do you know they're repentant? "Oh, they were crying and they were so sad and so grieved." That is not how you define repentance. That is not godly repentance. That is a kind of sorrow but not necessarily godly sorrow. Real repentance is not remorse, real repentance is not just some emotion, some sentiment, some sense of loss, some agony over the effect of your sin, it is a redirection of the will. So it involves faith, it is a part of it, turning from sin and fully trusting in the Lord. But it is also the redirection of the will and not just remorse. It is a purposeful choice to forsake all unrighteousness and pursue righteousness in its place.

Let me give you an illustration of it. Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 7:9-11, and this provides a very full illustration of this. Second Corinthians chapter 7, Paul is writing to the response of his first letter:

**9 I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of* repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of* God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. 10 For the sorrow that is according to *the will of* God produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. 11 For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.**

Note "I rejoice not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance." Repentance is something beyond sorrow. "You were made sorrowful according to the will of God." And what does that look like? What does real repentance look like? What does Godly sorrow look like? For that we look at verse 10. "The sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret." So, that's the first thing. That is the real deal, repentance that never changes. It's what all those quotes we saw before were saying, it's a once and for all in life and you never look back, and you never turn back, and you never go back, and there's no regret. There are many times, listen, when people are caught up in sin and caught up in guilt, and caught up in shame, and caught up in sorrow, and caught up in remorse by their sins and they make these grandiose statements that, "I'm not going to do that anymore and I just want to confess my sin and I want to set the record straight. I'm going to honor the Lord and I don't want this anymore." And all they're doing

is feeling the weight of the suffering that's come upon them because of the choices they made, but it isn't very long before all those desires and longings come back and they regret that they ever made that repentance and they want to go back to their sin. But the true repentance is a repentance without regret. That is a repentance to salvation. All the sorrow of the world does is produce death. You can be sorry and you can be very sorry, remorseful, even despairing about the agonies that have come upon you because of your sin and still die in your sin without salvation. We're talking here about the kind of repentance that leads to salvation being a real turning with no regret, never looking back.

Also note that he goes on to define it further in verse 11. It produces earnestness. "What earnestness," what is that? An eagerness for righteousness, an eagerness for righteousness. This very thing, this godly sorrow, he says, has produced this earnestness in you, this new soberness, this new eagerness to pursue what is right. And then he says, secondly, "What vindication," apologia, from which we get the word apologetic, it's a speech in defense. What it really means is a strong desire to clear your name, a strong desire to see the stigma of sin removed to prove yourself worthy of trust, to prove the legitimacy of your faith, to prove that your confession of Christ is real. You want to make everyone know of your repentance. It's not done in a corner. You want to show people that it's real. You want to be vindicated. You want to make a speech in defense of the reality of this repentance. You hold nothing back, you want the world to know. He even adds, "What indignation... it means to be angry. What are they angry about? Their sin. It's to be angry about sin. It's to be angry about the past. It's to be angry about the shame that it produces. What fear, what reverence, what awe of God of His holiness, of His grace, what longing, yearning for what is right, what zeal for holiness, what avenging of wrong...there is the evidence of the reality of your repentance. Truly repentant people have a strong desire to see justice done and to make restitution for the wrong that they've done and the way they've harmed people. They accept fully the consequence of their sin. That's the real deal...that's the real kind of repentance. It is a complete redirection of the will, to go along with that redirection of the mind in faith and at the same time turning from sin.

Certainly this is not some pre-salvation human work. We've seen in Acts 11 where God grants repentance. Second Timothy 2:25 says the same thing, a familiar verse, "Correcting those who are in opposition if perhaps God may grant them repentance," it's not a work added to salvation, it's a part of the saving work that God does in the heart. The call to repentance is not a call to fix up your life, to stop sinning so that you can then be saved. You may have had someone come to you and said, "My life is such a mess, I'm going to come to Christ but first I want to straighten out my life." You know how to answer?, "That is not the way it's done. Can the leper change his spots? Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Of course, not. Neither can you who are accustomed to do evil do good." It's not about you changing your life, it's about the saving work that God does. And when He does His real saving work in the human heart, repentance of this nature is produced. Repentance, the kind that God requires, is

just what Spurgeon described earlier...a settled refusal to set any limit on the claims Christ will lay on your life. You give up everything, take up the cross, even death to follow Him at any cost.

You are so eager to give up sin, it doesn't matter what the requirements are, it doesn't matter what He asks. And that was the problem with the rich, young ruler. He wasn't that interested in considering his sin, he didn't even want to acknowledge that he was a sinner. And it appears this works in our will by a process. First of all, it is intellectual. It begins with a recognition in your mind that sin as an affront to a holy God. You've got to have a definition of sin, you're not going to turn from it till you understand what it is, right? So part of effectively reaching people and calling them to repentance is defining for them what sin is. It's not just some human weakness, it's not just being normal, etc., etc., as you like to hear people think about it today. We have to have people understand sin is a violation of the Law of God, it is an affront to a holy God. It produces personal guilt that can never be removed throughout all eternity and will require everlasting punishment for those whose sin is not covered. And at that point you have to explain to them why Christ came, in order to bear the sins of those who would believe and to take their punishment in order that God might be just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus. It is nothing less than intellectual. You've got to understand sin and you've got to understand the provision for sin that comes in Christ and the horror of sin is seen not only in the definitions of sin in the Bible, but in the death of Christ where you see what sin produced.

It is also emotional because true repentance does produce sorrow. We just read that in 2 Corinthians, it is a sorrow unto repentance, sorrow that is a true and deep sorrow that produces a salvation that is real. It is a repentance without regret. It has an earnestness to it. It has a godly sorrow in it. It has a zeal and a longing and an indignation and a desire to make things right. Sure it's emotional. It is also, and finally so, volitional – part of our will after regeneration. It finally brings you to a change of direction, a willingness, even a determination, to abandon sin and stubborn disobedience and surrender to the will of Christ whatever it is, whatever He asks. It wasn't that the rich, young ruler could be saved by giving all his money away -- It was that which would surface whether or not his repentance was real. If he was genuinely wanting to be delivered from sin, if he had genuinely wanted to turn from sin to God, then it wouldn't have mattered what the Lord said. If the Lord said to him, "Give up everything," he would have said gladly. If the Lord had said to him, "Not only give up your money but give up your life for Me." Gladly, I want to be delivered from sin, I want to turn from sin, I want to turn toward righteousness.

In fact, true repentance even includes things that – before our salvation – we might have believed made us right before God. Things that in our own eyes and in the eyes of the world, should be pleasing to God. But look at how Paul dealt with this in his own life. There is a great lesson in the simple reading of Paul's own repentance in Philipians 3:2-15:

**2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; 3 for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,<sup>4</sup> although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.**

**7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;<sup>11</sup> in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.**

**12 Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; 16 however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained.**

So we look at this issue of repentance and what have we learned so far? It is a part of faith and belief, though it is not just that. Secondly, it is a redirection of the will. And let me just say, thirdly, and we could talk a lot more about it, but we need to approach a wrap up at this point, it is ***life changing***. And we have already seen that. You're never the same again, never. It alters everything. And let's move a little later in our little historical journey. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a faithful teacher in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, here's what he writes in his great classic work *The Sermon on the Mount*. He says, "Repentance means that you realize that you're a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God. That you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that you are hell bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called sin is in you, that you long to get rid of it and that you turn your back on it in every shape and form. You renounce the world, whatever the cost. The world in its mind and outlook as well as its practice and you deny yourself and take up the cross and go after Christ. Your nearest and dearest and the whole world may call you a fool, or say you have religious mania, you may have to suffer financially, it makes no difference, that is repentance." So we see all the way from the OT to sound biblical teachers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it's always been understood the same way. It is a complete

change, life-changing and it begins at salvation and that just starts a permanent lifelong process of ongoing confession of sin.

You want your sins washed away? Then repent. That's what Isaiah is saying. It starts internally, make yourself clean. And then it moves to your deeds, remove the evil of your deeds. Cease to do evil. I mean, this is just the biblical standard, it doesn't ever change. Salvation comes to those who turn from sin to God. Ezekiel 14:6, "Say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, repent, turn away from your idols, turn your faces away from all your abominations.'" Again, Ezekiel 18:30, "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct," declares the Lord God, "repent, turn away from all your transgressions. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you've committed, make yourselves a new heart, a new spirit. For why will you die, O house of Israel? I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies ... therefore repent and live."

So that when John the Baptist comes along and says, "Repent," everybody knows what he's talking about...Have you ever thought about that?. It's not shocking to the people that knew the OT and that heard John command everyone to repent. There is no biblical message, no gospel message that is legitimate that does not press the issue of repentance. Conversion to Christ demands this. You can always get people to line up and add Jesus to their life. You can always get people to say, you know, "I want Jesus in my life, I want Him to forgive all my sins, and I want to make sure that He takes me to heaven and I want Him to fix me and I want to have His power and His direction in my life – but keeping the way I want to live it." When you start talking about the real issue of true repentance and call on sinners to abandon their sin and turn from it for good, you're talking about something very different. People want to hold to their sin while having it conveniently forgiven. That's not repentance, not at all.

Listen to Matthew 21. "What do you think, a man had two sons," Jesus said, "he came to the first and said, 'Son, go to work today in the vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will, sir,' but he didn't go. Came to the second and said the same thing. He answered and said, 'I will not.' Afterward he regretted it, he repented and went. Which of the two did the will of His father? They said the latter. Jesus said to them, 'Truly I say to you, tax gatherers and harlots will get into the Kingdom of God before you.'"

You say you want to know God, you religious Jews. But in the end, you don't do what He asks. The others don't want any part of God at first, they don't want to do His will, but then they turn and obey. Two kinds of people, those who pretend to be obedient but are actually rebellious and those who begin rebellious but repent. He was indicting the Pharisees but they couldn't see it. And He was indicting all those people who say they want to serve God but never really get around to it. Really they want God to serve them. And that was a stinging rebuke of self-condemned religious people who never really did do God's will. Tax gatherers and harlots, the scum, the riff-raff have an open door to

the Kingdom rather than those superficially religious people who are verbally committed to the will of God but never in the heart do they do it.

So there's no salvation apart from repentance, the repentance that renounces sin. Is this a work of God? Absolutely it's a work of God. And while we believe that salvation is all a work of God and all the work of His mighty grace that overpowers us, it is that mysterious reality that it's not going to happen apart from repentance from sin and the Bible pleads with and commands sinners to repent. I don't know how all that works together, I'm not supposed to know. My feeble brain can't contain all the great realities of divine truth related to God's Sovereignty and human responsibility, but we are commanded to call sinners to repentance and we have to preach a gospel of repentance or else we're preaching something other than the biblical gospel. And so do you. And more importantly, as we learn from Jesus, you better be sure you're among those who have repented and put their trust in Jesus Christ because many will seek to get in the Kingdom, but they'll never win the battle over their own sin on their own:

**Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter."**

So to bring this back all the way to the opening passage in Galatians, can you now see what I meant about Galatians 5:24 being the key verse:

**Galatians 5:24 "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."**

Do you see why Paul uses the most violent form of death known at his time to describe what we must do to kill the fleshly passions and desires that remain in us? Do you see that just like our new birth (living by the Spirit), we cannot walk in the newness of life without the Spirit's power over sin through ongoing repentance? It is a great closing doctrinal statement in which to wrap the lists of those fleshly works which war against the fruit of the Spirit to which we are called when we have repented and believed.

Now, as we close, I do want to offer you an additional resource if you are interested in pursuing the doctrine of repentance a little further. I can recommend a very good YouTube sermon on the subject from Pastor Paul Washer entitled "The Gift Nobody Wants". If you simply enter that title into any search engine on the Internet, you will find a 1 hour and 10 minute sermon that really drives home the weakness of the modern professing American church on this essential doctrine. I highly recommend it.

Let's pray.