

Foundations Lesson #12

Repentance, Part 1

Repentance means simply turning **from** sin **to** God. I'd like to pause right here to say that all the rest of this lesson merely explains and illustrates this first sentence. Repentance means simply turning **from** sin **to** God. It involves doing an "about face" from who I am to who God wants me to be. In other words, when we find ourselves involved in something sinful – something we want rather than what God wants – and then in this sinful state we wake up to realize that we're going in the wrong direction, repentance would mean that we stop pursuing our own way, turn around, and start walking toward God rather than sin. Repentance involves a forsaking of sin and an embracing of God instead. Going on in our first paragraph, it is required of all people everywhere, both saved and unsaved. In Acts 17:30, Paul is preaching in Athens, and he says,

Ac. 17:30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

In the heart of God there's a deep desire for all to come to repentance. This can be seen in Ezekiel 18:23, which says, "Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?" and also in II Peter 3:9, "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."

Richard Owen Roberts, in his book entitled Revival, writes the following:

QUOTE #1 What urgent note characterized apostolic preaching but is scarcely heard in the church today? Why, of course, repentance! Time after time throughout the New Testament the call to repentance was sounded. The preaching of John the Baptist was dominated by this theme. With it he opened and closed his ministry. For the cause of repentance he lived and died. The mandatory nature of repentance was woven throughout the entire fabric of the life and ministry of Jesus himself and its urgent necessity repeatedly proclaimed. The church began, according to the book of Acts, with earnest calls to repentance and with severe warnings against those who refused to heed the call. At no time throughout the entire New Testament does this dominant theme disappear. Even the Revelation of Jesus Christ given to John on the Island of Patmos focused on the urgent necessity of repentance in five of the seven letters sent to the churches in the province of Asia. From beginning to end, the plain demand of the New Testament is **repent or perish!**

Why is so little heard on this subject in our day? How can we explain the existence of so many professing Christians in our churches who are not repentant? How can so many ministers justify their failure to make earnest calls to repentance a constant theme in their preaching when both the New Testament requires it and the lives of their people demonstrate its need?

With spiritual declension on every hand, with moral corruption rolling over the nation like a tidal wave, can there be any biblical doctrine more needed now than repentance?

Billy Graham has said this:

QUOTE #2 Repentance. The Bible commands it. Our wickedness demands it. Justice requires it. Christ preached it. And God expects it. The divine, unalterable edict is still valid, "God... commandeth all men everywhere to repent."

Television preachers rarely proclaim the message of repentance. Those who focus unduly on

their TV ratings place an emphasis on subjects that will make their hearers feel good. But those who love God wholeheartedly will want to hear about repentance, because they're not interested in feeling good, they're interested in living in such a way that God will feel good. Don't go to church to feel good. That's selfish. Go to church because you love God, because you want God, and because you need God.

Turning to Roman Numeral number one on our outline, let's get a better picture of how the Bible describes and explains repentance. From the Old Testament Hebrew, the word *naham* means to feel sorry, to lament, to grieve, to sigh or to groan. This word can literally refer to having difficulty breathing while experiencing deep emotion. It's used in Genesis 6:6, which says, "The LORD was **grieved** that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain." So when we repent, what is it that we should be sorry for? that we should lament or grieve over? I believe we need to see how deeply we've grieved and pained the LORD by our sin, and we turn from our sin so that **he** won't have to keep suffering the heartache we have caused him to experience.

The next word referring to repentance from the Old Testament Hebrew is the word *shubh*, which means to turn back, to make a radical change in attitude toward sin and God. It's the word for repentance which is most often used by the prophets. A good example of this is found in Ezekiel 14:6, which reads, "Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices!"

Then in New Testament Greek there are two primary words used to describe repentance. The first is *metanoia*, which means to have another mind, to change one's mind, attitude, and purpose regarding sin. It's an inner turning. This word emphasizes the intellectual and spiritual change that occurs when a sinner turns to God. The second Greek word, *epistrepho*, means to turn back or to return. It emphasizes the change of position resulting from repentance: from death to life, from sin to righteousness, from darkness to light, from being self-centered to being God-centered.

Fortunately, Scripture also provides us with several passages that help to explain what repentance is and what it is not. For example, the apostle Paul writing in II Corinthians 7:9-11 says,

2Co. 7:9-11 yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.

Paul's here contrasting godly sorrow with worldly sorrow. Worldly sorrow usually focuses on the unpleasant consequences having to be suffered, which is why Scripture declares that worldly sorrow brings death. But godly sorrow sees things from God's perspective. That's why the passage we just read says that godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.

A man who gets caught robbing a shop kills the shopkeeper in an attempt to escape. He's soon captured by the police, found guilty of murder, and sentenced to die. As he faces death, he says he's sorry, but why is he sorry? Is he sorry that he did wrong or is he just sorry that he got caught and now has to die?

A girl lives a life of sin with many men because of the lust of the flesh. When the consequences of her lifestyle begin to catch up with her and she lies dying of a dreadful disease, she says she's sorry, but is she sorry for committing sin? Or is she sorry that she now has to suffer and die? Many an alcoholic husband has said that they were sorry, but usually what they meant was that they were sorry for having a turbulent, stressful marriage, or for having to suffer the consequences of decreased job performance, or some other result of their drunkenness.

Anyone can be sorry that they have to face the disagreeable consequences of their actions. But this is worldly sorrow and not godly sorrow. Godly sorrow recognizes the pain suffered by **The Almighty** when the sin was committed. Then, out of a love for God, it resolves never again to bring such heartache upon the One who is so full of grace and goodness toward all humans.

I'm sure Pharaoh was quite sorry that Egypt was ruined when plague after plague struck his land. But even after the LORD made a clear distinction between the land of the Egyptians and the land of the Israelites, Pharaoh's sorrow never led him to repentance. It was worldly sorrow, not godly sorrow. So how can we discern if the person before us has worldly sorrow or godly sorrow? Easy. See what happens next. If they repent of their sin, it was godly sorrow. If they return to their sin, it was worldly sorrow.

Next we see that true repentance is not a matter of penance, or punishing self in an effort to pay for the sin.

Mt. 27:3-5 When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood."

"What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility."

So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

I imagine we can all agree that a great tragedy took place when Judas, one who had followed Jesus for years, committed suicide. I'm sure he felt quite sorry for what he had done. But his sorrow didn't turn him to God, so he tried to pay for his sin by punishing himself. The great problem with that kind of thinking is that Christ has already taken the punishment for our sin when he died on the cross. Isaiah, speaking prophetically about Jesus Christ, says, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." When we punish ourselves for our sin, we're trying to get right with God by our own means, which can never work. We're actually declaring, by our actions, that Christ's sacrificial death wasn't good enough, that it was somehow insufficient, that it had to be augmented by our fleshly efforts. Of course, that's completely ridiculous. It's totally impossible for us to improve upon anything God has done. Yet, tragically, some people try. The woman who recites religious sayings over and over in order to atone for her sin is actually insulting Christ's sacrifice, which has provided all the forgiveness necessary for every sin ever committed by any human being ever to live on planet earth. The man who lies on a bed of nails because he's conscious of his sin may see the problem clearly, but he's completely missed the solution. Colossians 2:23 puts it this way:

Col. 2:23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

So let's remember to apply the work of Christ on the cross to our sin in repentance, rather than trying to pay for our sin by punishing self.

Then in Acts chapter 8, we have an example of someone who demonstrated a desire for reformation rather than repentance. Simon the Sorcerer seemed to be quite concerned about what might happen to him externally, but he made no request to have his heart changed, which is a necessity for true repentance to occur. Starting in verse 18, the Scripture reads,

Ac. 8:18-24 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said

may happen to me.”

I'm sure God would've been much more pleased with Simon's request had he said, “Pray to the Lord for me that this wickedness, bitterness, and sin would be cleansed from my heart.” Again, repentance is not a matter of outward reformation, it's a matter of inward transformation. Reformation is like putting on a coat of paint – making it look good; repentance is dealing with what's underneath the paint. Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. In Matthew 23:27-28, Jesus declared:

Mt. 23:27-28 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

If we allow God to deal with our hearts – what's on the inside – then the outside will be clean as well. Again, in true repentance we confess our failure to God and cry to him for help. Lastly, repentance is not a matter of self-condemnation. Romans 8:1 says,

Ro. 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

I'd like to contrast condemnation and conviction for a minute. First, there are similarities between the two. In either case, when we're under condemnation or under conviction, we'll have a realization that we did wrong, that we blew it. No one will have to show us the error of our ways, because we see our sin clearly. However, condemnation goes on to say, “You're a miserable failure. You're no good. There's no hope for you. You may as well just give up because you'll never amount to anything.” That's condemnation. Conviction, on the other hand, says, “Yeah, you blew it, but there's still hope. You can get right with God. You can repent. You did wrong, but you can throw yourself on the mercies of God. He still loves you. He still considers you to be precious and valuable. There's a solution to the problem you've created. This can be fixed. Run to God.” That's conviction. Do you see the difference? Condemnation offers no hope, whereas conviction points us to the remedy, and the remedy is always the same – God is our remedy.

Billy Graham had this to say about conviction:

QUOTE You must know what is right before you can know what is wrong. If you get on the wrong road, you will never know it until you have some knowledge of the right road. You stray off the highway and first you miss the familiar markings, the customary scenery, and then suddenly the conviction strikes you that you have lost your way. There can be no turning back unless first there is a conviction that you are going the wrong way.

Spiritual conviction is like that. It's a signpost planted in the heart saying, “Stop, look, listen! Danger ahead!” The Spirit of God, your conscience, and your better judgment all join to warn, “Detour! Change! You're on the wrong road!” If you have this conviction, be thankful. God is waving the red flag, like a watchman standing guard where a bridge is out, directing you to change your course before it's too late.

May God give each of us grace to heed the conviction of his Spirit, and to repent every time we need to. Amen.

Foundations Lesson #12

Repentance, Part 2

Roman numeral number two on our outline deals with the results of Repentance. In Acts 26:20, the apostle Paul is speaking to King Agrippa, and he says,

Ac. 26:20 First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.

Genuine repentance is evidenced by a genuinely changed life. If the life hasn't changed, there hasn't been true repentance. John the Baptist made it very clear that fruit, or evidence, would always follow authentic repentance. I'm reading from Luke 3:7-14:

Lk. 3:7-14 John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."
"What should we do then?" the crowd asked.
John answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same."
Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"
"Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.
Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?"
He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely – be content with your pay."

John the Baptist's ministry emphasized repentance, but that repentance was practical and it was easily verified by those who were observing the lives of the ones who had turned to God. John instructed those who submitted to his baptism to give generously to those in need, and to excel in doing what was just and right, giving specific examples of the godly behavior he was talking about.

In Psalm 32, David writes about a personal experience where he learned that repentance is beneficial. He writes in verses 3-5,

Ps. 32:3-5 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. *Selah*
Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD" – and you forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah*

David found that repentance involves acknowledging and confessing sin to God rather than trying to cover up the sin or not talking about it to **The Almighty**. Another aspect of genuine repentance is that the person repenting will want to make things right not only with God, but also with those humans he's wronged by his sin. Zacchaeus is an excellent example of someone making restitution to man as a result of having repented. We read in Luke's gospel, chapter 19 and starting in verse 8,

Lk. 19:8-9 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay

back four times the amount.”

Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.

At the heart of repentance is a desire to be restored to a healthy, proper relationship. First and foremost, that involves our relationship to God. But if our desire to be restored to a healthy relationship with ***The Almighty*** is authentic, we'll also have a strong desire to be restored to a healthy relationship with the humans who've been negatively impacted by our sin. After all, God wants us to have good, healthy relationships with our fellow man, as far as it depends on us.

When I was a high school student, I stole a reel-to-reel tape from the music department there. Shortly after getting saved when I was a junior in college, I knew I had to return that tape. As embarrassing as it was – and it was **very** embarrassing – I had to return that tape and admit that I'd stolen it. That taught me something. The more you or I love God, the less we'll care how embarrassing it is. Why? Because we're living our life before an audience of One. When the entire purpose of our life is to please God, no embarrassment, no pain, no sacrifice will deter us.

Another result of repentance is personal holiness. I think that's pretty obvious. Whenever we turn from our sin to God, we'll be more holy as a result.

Ac. 3:19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

2Co. 7:1 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

In this verse, I believe our “purifying ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit” is a picture of repentance, which yields the fruit of “perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” True repentance will not just make us sorry, it will make us surrendered to God.

So far, we've examined what happens in the believer as a result of repentance. But what God does is also vitally important. Scripture tells us that he extends forgiveness and pardon.

2Chr. 32:26 Then Hezekiah repented of the pride of his heart, as did the people of Jerusalem; therefore the LORD's wrath did not come upon them during the days of Hezekiah.

1Jn. 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Jer. 18:7-8 [God speaking] 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.

Finally, in addition to what happens in the believer and what God does in response to repentance, Scripture tells us that heaven rejoices!

Lk. 15:7 [Jesus speaking] I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

And three verses later Jesus again says,

Lk. 15:10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

So we have some incredible results that spring forth as a result of repentance: Heaven rejoices. God extends forgiveness and pardon. Relationships get healed. Personal holiness results. What more could anyone ask for? You would think that with all these profound benefits, believers all over the world would be ready to repent at the tiniest bit of conviction from God, at the smallest inclination that sin is present. But, regrettably, experience shows us that it usually doesn't work that way. Many believers who would benefit greatly by turning **from** their sin **to** God, find it very difficult to do so. They struggle. Even the Scripture itself tells us about people who returned to their old ways, to their own destruction. II Peter 2:20-22 puts it this way:

2Pt. 2:20-22 If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

We can grieve and agonize over anyone making such a tragic decision. Through our tears we can ask, "Why did they return?" With the power of God at their disposal they had everything they needed to overcome. But the painful truth remains that they didn't repent. In the next section, the subject of hindrances to repentance is covered. The list here isn't exhaustive, but some of the most prominent reasons are mentioned. Before we get into those obstacles, I want to be crystal clear that every one of them **can** be overcome and **must** be overcome. Let's remember that as believers, the same power that spoke the universe into existence is coursing through our veins by the person of the Holy Spirit. If God is for us, who can be against us?? You can be victorious, and so can I. So let's take a look at what we're able to defeat because God is with us.

The first hindrance is that of being too dull or self-centered to see our need of repentance. In this scenario, the voice of God is saying to us, "Turn! Change your direction!" but we don't even notice. Our ears are full of wax and our hearts are calloused, so we don't even realize that God is speaking.

When I was in Bible School, one of our professors, Dr. Smith, told us that when we were reading a textbook, we could use a method that would save time. If we read and understood the first sentence of a paragraph, we could skip to the last sentence of that paragraph. If we understood that, we didn't have to read what was in between. I thought that the Dr. Smith method was great, but I took it even one step further. Instead of reading the first and last sentence of every paragraph, I read the first and last word of every chapter. I called it the revised Dr. Smith method. My roommate called it the seared conscience method. Of course he was right, but there was a period of time where I just didn't have ears to hear the truth of what he, and others, were telling me. The disciples had the same problem.

Mt. 15:16 "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them [the disciples].

Mk. 8:18 [Jesus again speaking to his disciples] Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?

How can this hindrance of dullness and self-centeredness be overcome? Let's consider every criticism that comes our way seriously, by taking it to prayer and asking God what he has to say about it. Every criticism prayed over. But then also worshiping God increases our tenderness to the Lord and has a way of dealing with some of our dullness, insensitivity, and self-centeredness that we're so prone to. Let's be sure to get lost in God's presence in worship every day.

The next hindrance on our list is being right, or wise, in our own eyes.

Pr. 26:12 Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Is. 5:21

Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.

Pr. 3:7

Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.

We've all encountered people who were completely convinced that they were right, but they were actually wrong. If we're willing to admit it, probably every one of us has been wrong when we thought we were right. One aged minister shared a poem with me that goes like this:

Poem

Here lie the bones of John LaDay,
Who died, maintaining his right of way.
He was right, dead right, as he went along.
But he's just as dead as if he'd been wrong.

There's a story of a psychiatrist who had a patient come into his office who alleged to be dead. The patient claimed that all his problems in life stemmed from the fact that he was actually dead. The psychiatrist tried to convince him in every possible way that he wasn't dead, but to no avail. Finally, in a flash of inspiration, the psychiatrist asked his patient, "Do dead men bleed?" When the man answered that dead men do not bleed, the psychiatrist continued pressing his point until he was satisfied that his patient was truly convinced that dead men do not bleed. Then he took a pin and pricked the man's finger. Sure enough, blood came out. The psychiatrist victoriously said, "This proves that you're not dead! Dead men don't bleed and you are bleeding. You are not dead!" The patient's jaw dropped. His eyes grew wide in amazement. Finally, he said, "Wow! I wouldn't have believed it. Dead men do bleed after all."

So how do we overcome this blind spot of being right in our own eyes? Humility. Pride says, "I'm right. I know I'm right." Humility says, "I believe I'm right but I could be wrong. After all, I've been wrong many times before." Only God is never wrong. Let's not believe that we're perfect like ***The Almighty***.

The next hindrance to repentance is our loving our sin. To the degree that the smoker loves his cigarettes, to the degree that the sexually immoral man loves his fornication, to the degree that the greedy man loves his money, to that degree they won't repent. Why? Because they love their sin.

Am. 5:15a

Hate evil, love good;

Pr. 8:13a

To fear the Lord is to hate evil,

Pr. 13:5a

The righteous hate what is false,

Pr. 15:27b

...but he who hates bribes will live.

Pr. 28:16b

...but he who hates ill-gotten gain will enjoy a long life.

Hebrews 1:9 speaks of Jesus Christ. It says,

Heb. 1:9

You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy."

Many years ago, I began playing a computer game with my sons. After a while I really enjoyed playing this game. I figured out possibilities and developed strategies that no one had ever come up with before. But one day I woke up to the fact that that game was consuming me. I had to quit. But I didn't want to quit because I really loved playing the game. So I did the only thing I knew to do. I got alone in the bedroom, closed the door, and cried out to God. After 20 to 25 minutes of fervently asking God to give me the strength to do what was best, I was able to take all my notes and

strategies and throw them into the dumpster. That was very difficult for me to do, but it was necessary. Why do I mention this story? Because we all need to appreciate the fact that God is able to change our hearts. If we love something that we should be hating, God can and will help us, if we sincerely cry out to him. But we first have to have the issue settled in our hearts that the #1 priority of our existence is to please God. Jesus must be Lord of all our words, our deeds, our priorities, our attitudes, our choices, and our affections.

The next hindrance to repentance is pride. Let's face it, in order to repent, we need humility. We have to admit to ourselves and to God that we've been going the wrong way.

Pr. 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

Pr. 16:5 The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished.

Pr. 18:12 Before his downfall a man's heart is proud, but humility comes before honor.

1Pt. 5:5b-6 All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

It may very well feel uncomfortable for us to repent because it requires admitting we were wrong and dying to self. That's not easy. If dying to self was easy, everybody would be doing it! But even though it's not easy, it's ***always*** worth it; it's ***always*** beneficial; it's ***always*** advantageous.

Another hindrance to repentance is having no fear of God. This happens when we think that we'll be just fine, even if we don't repent before the Lord. We somehow picture ourselves as being strong enough to handle whatever may come our way. Our attitude is one of, "I'll get away with it."

Ps. 36:1 An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes.

Ex. 20:20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

1Pt. 2:17 Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

These Scriptures point out to us that it's appropriate and beneficial for us to have a healthy fear of God. After all, he's far, far stronger than we are, and he's far, far holier than we are. If we have this fear of the Lord, we won't even think that we're strong enough to stand unrepentant before his throne without suffering serious consequences.

Another problem arises when we focus on the power of our sinful habit rather than focusing on the power of God. We may have given up hope because the last several dozen times we repented, we still ended up going back to the sin. Then, despondently, we may feel it's useless to keep going to the Lord in repentance because doing that "hasn't worked." But the main difficulty lies with our focus. The more we focus on sin, the more we'll get discouraged. The more we focus on God, the more true ***life*** we'll have.

Eph. 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,

Ps. 68:35 You are awesome, O God, in your sanctuary; the God of Israel gives power and strength to his people. Praise be to God!

So let me encourage you. When you repent, don't look at how often you've failed. Don't rehearse all you past weaknesses. Don't agree with the devil that your situation won't change. Focus on the power of God that will transform you today!

The final obstacle to repentance on our outline is lack of perseverance. How often do you or I need to repent? As often as necessary. We need to repent every time we notice something in our lives that doesn't please God. We need to repent every time God convicts us.

Years ago I was in a situation where I was accused of many things and was treated quite badly by some church people. When I left there, I felt I had forgiven those individuals, but three to five months later, old feelings of bitterness crept up once again, so I brought those attitudes to the Lord in repentance and asked for his transforming power. Then I was grateful that I had **really** forgiven, until, several months later, the same thing happened all over again. In fact, I had to deal with feelings of anger, resentment, or bitterness for **five years** until the healing was complete. In this particular circumstance, I believe the Lord was ministering life and healing to me somewhat like peeling an onion – one layer at a time.

Jas. 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Heb. 10:36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Lk. 11:5-10 Then he [Jesus] said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'

"Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

From what I understand, the verb tense in the original Greek for asking, seeking, and knocking is that of a continuous action in the present. In other words, it carries the idea we should ask and continue to ask, seek and continue to seek, knock and continue to knock. Let's not be satisfied with a partial victory. Let's persevere, let's continue to ask, seek, knock, and repent until we have the fullness of what God has for us. Amen.

Foundations Lesson #12

Repentance, Part 3

On page two of our outline, Roman Numeral number four gives us some examples of repentance from the Bible.

Mt. 12:41 [Jesus speaking] 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.

We can read in the book of Jonah what took place in greater detail.

Jnh. 3:4-10

On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned." The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, heard or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

Scripture gives us another example of repentance from the life of Job. In the book of Job chapter 42, Job is speaking to the Lord. He says,

Job 42:5-6

My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

It's interesting to note that Job hadn't committed any major, dark, devious, dastardly sin. He was a very godly individual. He'd suffered horribly even though he hadn't done anything to deserve what happened to him. In his great pain and agony, he had defended his innocence when his friends adamantly maintained that his suffering was a result of sin in his life. But in defending himself, he'd gone a bit too far, and so he tainted the justice of ***The Almighty***. When God finally speaks to Job, he says, "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?" and "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?" When God finishes his amazing four-chapter monologue, Job is quick to repent. I believe the more godly a person is, the faster they'll see their need to repent, and the more quickly and thoroughly they'll turn to God in true repentance.

King David provides us with another example of repentance. After David had committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, he had Uriah killed in battle. In II Samuel 12:9-14, the prophet Nathan confronts the King. He says,

2Sa. 12:9-14

Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'

"This is what the LORD says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'"

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die."

Psalms 51 is David's cry of repentance to God. I won't read it now, but I invite you to read it, slowly, at your leisure. In it, you'll hear the heart of a man who's deeply brokenhearted over his wrongdoing, yet who's also desperately wanting to be right with God. It's a beautiful and powerful example of repentance that has often inspired me. I trust it'll inspire you, too.

There are many other examples of repentance in Scripture, but I want to mention one more specifically.

Lk. 22:59-62 About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean."

Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Peter had, earlier that same night, declared that he would never deny Jesus. Yet, he denied the Lord three times, just as Jesus had said that he would. In the Scripture we just read, Peter is seized with remorse and he repents, weeping bitterly. About 50 days later, when the Spirit was outpoured on the 120 believers in the upper room, Peter preached the first sermon of the church and about 3,000 people came to Christ. Incidentally, I believe the main difference between Peter and Judas is that Peter repented and Judas didn't.

Roman Numeral number five on our outline mentions some other aspects of repentance as it's illustrated and mentioned in the Scripture. As we read earlier, repentance is commanded by God.

Ac. 17:30 [Paul is preaching in Athens] In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

We also see that repentance is a gift from God. After we've repented, we're not at liberty to pat ourselves on the back, saying, "Oh, wasn't I so good!? I repented." No. It was by his grace.

Ac. 11:18 When they [church leaders in Jerusalem] heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

God granted it. They had to respond, but God granted it.

2Ti. 2:25-26 Those who oppose him [the Lord's servant] he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Some Christians sin believing they'll just be able to repent afterwards. Repentance is a gift. You can't depend on a gift. Whether or not you or I receive a gift depends not on us but on the giver. In Exodus 14:4 God declares that he'll harden Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh, on *this* occasion, did not receive the gift of repentance. Now if you study the ten plagues that came upon the Egyptians, you'll find that Pharaoh hardened his own heart six times before God ever hardened his heart. God certainly gave Pharaoh much opportunity, but finally he drew the line. God took Pharaoh's heart in the posture of hardness Pharaoh himself had chosen many times and God froze it in that state to reveal his own glory and his great authority. If you're interested, in the **Additional Resources** section of this web page, you'll find a chart on the ten plagues of Egypt which shows the details of who hardened Pharaoh's heart and when. For now, let's remember: repentance is a gift.

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

As we studied in Lesson #3 on the topic of Salvation, repentance is a necessary aspect of what we humans need to do in order to escape the kingdom of darkness and enter into the family of God.

It's required of the unsaved. Ephesians 2:1-2 points out to us that before coming to Christ, all of us were spiritually dead. Those verses read,

Eph. 2:1-2 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

Spiritually dead people can only produce dead works, which Hebrews 6 tells us is cause for repentance. Also, Jesus made it plain that those who would turn to him and escape perishing eternally needed to repent.

Mk. 1:14-15 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Lk. 13:3 [Jesus speaking] ...But unless you repent, you too will all perish.

Another aspect of repentance is that it's required of the saved; it's required of Christians. I invite you, some time soon, to read chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation. There you'll find seven letters, one sent to each of seven different churches in the province of Asia. Five of those churches were called to repent. Our outline briefly mentions what each one needed to repent of. Please understand: for all of us, repentance is not something once done and forever accomplished. Each of us believers needs to repent every time God convicts us, every time we notice anything in our life that doesn't please the Lord. So repentance has to remain an ongoing commitment for every believer. It's much like the foundation of a building. Once the foundation for a building has been laid, it continues to stabilize the whole building. The foundation is used every day that the building stands. Similarly, once we have a strong foundation of repentance, we can continue to draw on the strength of that foundation every time we need it, so that we can repent without delay and without resisting God. We should carry with us an attitude that's always ready to repent, always ready to forsake sin and turn to God.

We also see that repentance was preached all throughout the Bible. John the Baptist preached repentance.

Mk. 1:4 And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Ac. 13:24 Before the coming of Jesus, John [that is, John the Baptist] preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, also preached repentance.

Mt. 4:17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

Lk. 5:32 [Jesus speaking] I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

The twelve sent out by Jesus preached repentance.

Mk. 6:12 They [the Twelve] went out and preached that people should repent.

The early church preached repentance often. I want to give two examples from Scripture.

Lk. 24:46-47 He [Jesus] told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Ac. 26:20 [Paul speaking to King Agrippa] First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.

I'd like to close this lesson with one final exhortation and a closing Scripture. My exhortation is this: never put off repenting. Never say, or think, “I'll repent later.” No. To put repenting off into the future is to disobey God in the present. We can't be doing that.

My closing Scripture is from Ezekiel 18:30, which says, “Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall.” Amen. God bless you all.