

Repentance

Religion vs. Repentance

- Many think the word repent means "to get your act together" or to "get religion" or "fly straight"; as if we could. Repentance requires taking in a whole new point of view; *looking at it God's way*. God simply asks us to **turn**. This is the way we accept His gift. When we do, certain outcomes are promised. If we don't, or we "turn back", alternate outcomes are promised.

Look And Live

Numbers 21:8-9 (NIV) The Lord said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can *look at it* and live." ...Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.

- Let's imagine ourselves in this situation. Poisonous snakes have bitten everyone, and while we are not dead yet, the prospects do not look good. Suddenly a voice yells out: "We must do something. We must save ourselves!" But how? Various ideas surface such as: "If you run around in frantic activity it will work out the poison!" A few people try this, and die trying. Others, by staring at their bites, go totally berserk into a frenzy of panic. Alternately, some try to convince themselves that they are not bitten, or that the snakes were not poisonous, and form little groups to delude each other while dying. And here's a person selling "snake oil" which purports to be an antitoxin, but makes people even worse.
- Enter Moses who says, "If you look at the bronze snake that has been lifted up on this pole, you will live. If you do not, no matter what else you do, you will die." Now let's really picture how we might react, having been given this revelation. "He must be kidding," we would think. "Do nothing? Just look? How insulting a solution! What part do we play in it?" Moses responds, "Cease your activities. Just look, and live!" Really now, if you had been there, would you have believed it? Do you believe God's solution today?

John 3:14 (NIV) [Jesus:] "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up."

- We all have been bitten, and sin is coursing through our veins. It will most certainly lead to death. There is only one solution, but it is an offense to our ability to save ourselves.

John 6:40a (NIV) "For my father's will is that everyone who *looks to* the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life."

John 6:29 (NIV) Jesus answered, "The *work* of God is this: to *believe* in the one he has sent."

Turn Or Burn

Luke 13:3b (NIV) "But unless you repent, you too will all perish." [This is often termed the "Turn or Burn" passage.]

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

Matthew 3:2 (Phi) "You must *change your hearts and minds*, for the Kingdom of Heaven has arrived!"

Mark 6:12 (TEB) So they went out and preached that people should turn away from their sins.

Acts 2:38 (NIV) Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The Two Ways

- The "way" we are looking: 1) will **make sense** if we look long enough; 2) will **create desire** to move in that direction; and 3) will **lead to** something. First, we will look at how this applies to man's way.

Proverbs 14:12 (NIV) There is a way that **seems right** to a man, but in the end it **leads to** death.

- If our line of sight is along our own way, or the way of the world, then this will begin to make sense to us as we continue to meditate on it, even if the way we are looking is really stupid. With this mind set, desire will spring up, which is the fuel that will lead us to destruction.
- Any sin would do as an example, but let's take bitterness. If someone has done evil to us, the more we think about it, the more it will make sense to hate them, to burn with anger, to feel again the hurt. As we focus on the way of revenge, desire takes root and bitterness sets in. And where does this all lead?

James 1:14-15 (NIV) But each one is tempted when, by his own evil **desire**, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to **death**.

Ezekiel 18:23-31 (NIV) "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?... Because he considers all the offenses he has committed and **turns away from** them, he will surely live; he will not die... Repent! **Turn away from** all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel?"

Ezekiel 33:11 (NIV) ... "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they **turn from their ways** and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways!..."

Man's Way And God's Way Contrasted

Ephesians 4:17-24 (NIV) So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the **futility of their thinking**. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ **that way**. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off the old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful **desires**; to be made new in the **attitude of your minds**; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 2:1-3 (Phi) You were spiritually dead through your sins and failures, all the time you followed **this world's ideas of living**, and obeyed the evil ruler of the spiritual realm, who is indeed fully operative today in those who disobey God. We all lived like that in the past, and followed **the desires** and imaginings of our lower natures, being, in fact, under the wrath of God by nature, like everyone else.

Galatians 5:16 (NIV) So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify **the desires** of the sinful nature.

What Are You Looking At?

- It has been said that "a righteous man does whatever he wants , but only wants to do the will of God." The "only wants" part comes from reckoning our carnal selves crucified with Christ. We do this by quickly repenting when we are caught meditating on sin, turning to God. If we do not, and give the "way of the world" its chance, our desire to sin will grow. Unconsummated carnal desire is corruption and death, even if we do not actually commit the sin.

Matthew 5:28-29 (NIV) "But I tell you that anyone who **looks at** a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell."

- Desire itself is not the problem. The problem is the object of our desire. Desires are meant to be consummated, not to burn on uncrucified or spent on sin. Knowing how we function, God promises and gives us **new desires** by His Spirit, which makes righteousness an "easy yoke" to the repentant. We turn; He empowers. We lose "our" lives; He makes us new creations with a new mind, new desires (heart), and new works (fruit).

Romans 8:5-9 (NIV) Those who live according to the sinful nature have their **minds set** on what that

nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their **minds set** on what the Spirit desires. The mind of the sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.

Looking At It God's Way

- So how can we break out of the death-spiral of the way of sin **seeming right, creating desire, and leading to destruction**? We must repent; we must turn or perish. But to what? If we turn to just another of "man's ways" we have just set our sights down another road to death. Instead, we must find out what God's will, God's way, is and turn to that.

Ephesians 5:15-17 (NIV) Be very careful, then, how you live, not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but **understand what the Lord's will is**.

- Back to our example of bitterness, if we turn from fantasizing about actually hurting the perpetrator in some vengeful way to just wallowing in hurt, pain, and pity instead; this is not repentance. Repentance is **taking in God's point of view**; looking at it His way.

Ephesians 5:8-10 (NIV) For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth) and **find out what pleases the Lord**.

- Note that if God by His grace reveals something to us that we can turn to, it may not make sense **right away**. In our example of bitterness, God's will is forgiveness! "Ridiculous, that would not be right," is our first reaction. (Again, any sin will do as an example.) But if we do not allow our eye to flinch as we take in God's perspective, if we **keep staring at it**, we will find that it is good, pleasing, and perfect. Beyond "seeming right", it really *is* right.

- In our example, if we move from bitterness to forgiveness, we find out that God's way is the best "revenge", that forgiveness is like "pouring coals over the heads" of our enemies. If we forgive instead of wallowing in bitterness, the perpetrator's grip over us is broken, and we find that we were only hurting ourselves. If we continue to take in God's point of view, then after time we will look back at *the old way* and say "What was I thinking? Ridiculous!" So do not grow impatient if God's way does not immediately appeal to you; keep staring at it.

James 1:25 (Phi) But the man who **looks into** the perfect law, the law of liberty, and **makes a habit of so doing**, is not the man who hears and forgets. He puts that law into practice and he wins true happiness.

Ps 34:5,8 (NIV) Those who **look to** him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame... Taste and see that the Lord is good.

The Gift Of God That Goes With Repentance: New Appetites

1 Peter 2:2 (NIV) Like newborn babies, **crave** pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Ps 119:104-105 (NIV) I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore, I **hate** every wrong path. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Ps 16:11 (NIV) You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal **pleasures** at your right hand.

2 Peter 1:3-4 (NIV) His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his **very great and precious promises**, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil **desires**.

Rom 12:1-2 (NIV) Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the *renewing of your mind*. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his **good, pleasing, and perfect will**.

Warnings To Those Who Hanker To "Look Back"

Isaiah 30:15 (NIV) This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it."

Philippians 3:19 (NIV) Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is their shame. Their **mind is on** earthly things.

2 Peter 2:21-22 (NIV) 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 own vomit," and "A sow that is washed goes back to wallowing in the mud."

Luke 9:62 (NEB) To him Jesus said, "No one who sets his hand to the plow and then **keeps looking back** is fit for the kingdom of God."

The Urgency Of Repentance

Isaiah 55:6-7 (NIV) Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake **his way** and the evil man **his thoughts**. Let him **turn to** the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

Rom 2:4 (Phi) Are you, perhaps, misinterpreting God's generosity and patient mercy towards you as weakness on his part? Don't you realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

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

James 5:19-20 (Phi) My brothers, if any of you should wander away from the truth and another should **turn him back** on to the **right path**, then the latter may be sure that in turning a man back from his wandering course he has rescued a soul from death, and in so doing will "cover a multitude of sins."

Rev 3:3 (Phi) "Remember what you were taught. Hold to those things and repent."

The Object Of Desire

1 John 2:15-17 (Phi) Never give your hearts to this world or to any of the things in it. A man cannot love the Father and love the world at the same time. For the whole world-system, based as it is on **men's desires**, their greedy ambitions and the glamour of all that they think splendid, is not derived from the Father at all, but from the world itself. The world and all of its passionate desires will one day disappear. But the man who is following **God's will** is part of the permanent and cannot die.

Matthew 6:32-33 (Phi) That is what pagans are always **looking for**; your Heavenly Father knows that you need them all. **Set your heart** first on his kingdom and his goodness, and all these things will come to you as a matter of course.

Col 3:2 (NIV) Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Ps 101:3a (NIV) I will set before my eyes no vile thing.

Rom 13:14 (NIV) ... clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and **do not think about** how to gratify **the desires** of your sinful nature.

Ps 105:4 (NIV) **Look to** the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.

Ps 119:36-37 (NIV) Turn my heart toward your statutes and not towards selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word.

Acts 2:38 (TEB) Peter said to them, "Turn away from your sins, each one of you, and be baptized in the

name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit."

Turn Or Burn

2 Tim 2:19 (NIV) "The Lord knows those who are his," and "everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must **turn away** from wickedness."

- When at first we hear "repent or perish", it seems harsh. But as we turn, we see that it is an incredible gift to have something to **turn to**. If not for God's love, our only option would be to perish. But the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has appeared. To have the option to turn is sweet indeed.

Acts 3:19 (NIV) "Repent, then, and **turn to** God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

Hebrews 12:2a (NIV) Let us **fix our eyes** on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.



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