

Repentance And Conversion

Intro:

The call to repentance has been a continuing theme all through the Bible right on down into the last days. Not just for the unsaved, but the people of God as well. Not just for the OT people of God, Israel, but for the Church as well. The church in **Ephesus**, “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and **repent**, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” Revelation 2:5 The church in **Pergamos**, “**Repent**; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.” Revelation 2:16 The church in **Thyatira**, “And I gave her space to **repent** of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.” Revelation 2:21,22

The concept of repentance, and what is really entailed in it, which we will get into, is very important for the believer in Christ to know, for he must be able to communicate it to the unsaved, either in his/her personal witnessing, or in preaching the gospel, for without repentance and faith in Christ there is no salvation, no forgiveness of sins, only the certainty of the unbeliever continuing on their path to Hell and eventually the lake of fire. But he also needs to understand it for his own personal walk with the Lord. What happens if he drifts away from his walk with God? What happens if he gets caught up in the things of the flesh, or the world, or the devil? What does he have to do to get back on the right path? What does he need to do to get back to that place of sweet communion with God? We will see that repentance and conversion are very crucial in this matter.

Other NT passages on the matter of repentance: Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15; 6:12; Luke 13:3,5; 16:30; 17:3,4; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 26:20; 2 Corinthians 7:8; Matthew 3:8,11; 19:13; Mark 1:4; 2:17; Luke 3:3,8; 5:32; 15:7; 24:47; Romans 2:4; 11:29; 2 Corinthians 7:9; 11:29; 2 Timothy 2:25; Hebrews 6:1,6; 2 Peter 3:9.

A. Definition:

People have a misunderstanding on this matter of repentance and conversion. And usually distort the meaning of repentance into “feeling sorry” for their sins, which is not the case. To help us in our understanding of what is meant by repentance is seeing, first of all, that there are three Greek words that are generally used in the matter of repentance: **one**, *strepheo*, *epistrepheo* and *apostrepheo* of the *strepheo* word group, **two**, *metanoeo*, and **three**, *metamelomai*.

Some OT passages dealing with the matter of repentance and conversion: “If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, **turn from their evil**, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.” Jeremiah 18:8 “Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. **Return unto me**, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?” Malachi 3:7 “They will not frame their doings **to turn unto their God**: for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and they have not known the LORD.” Hosea 5:4 “And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and **hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD** God of Israel.” 2 Chronicles 36:13 “Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent, and **turn yourselves from your idols**; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.” Ezekiel 14:6

Conversion comes from the *strephe* word group: *strephe*, *epistrephe*, *apostrephe* and *anastrephe*, from which we get the ideas of to turn to, to turn from, to return to and conversion, which is derived from the Latin word conversio – a turning around. It originally came from the idea of **turning the soul to the brightest star in the sky**. The poets and philosophers took the word *strephe* to denote **the turning of the soul to God**, and that idea has been its definition ever since.

The word began with the idea of turning and later on it developed into the idea of turning to, or turning toward something. When it was used, the idea of what or whom one was turning to was the important thing, not what one was turning from. And in the Bible it is always God and his Son, Jesus Christ, as the one we are turning our souls to that is of paramount importance, not what we are turning from.

Now if one was caught up in something that was holding them back from turning to God, then *apostrephe* would be used. Of course the important thing is that it is God they are turning to, but in varying situations they are told **to turn from** this or that in their turning to God. Such as in the case of idolatry, “*Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.*” Ezekiel 14:6

This **conversion**, or turning the soul to God, is described as a **turning from evil**. “*If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.*” Jeremiah 18:8.

Conversion can refer to a **returning to the Lord**, “*Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?*” Malachi 3:7.

Man can be **so permeated by the evil** he is involved in that he **resists** such turning to God, “*They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God: for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and they have not known the LORD.*” Hosea 5:4.

Man can become so arrogant and bitter that he will not turn to the Lord, or return to the Lord. “*And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he **stiffened his neck**, and **hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD** God of Israel.*” 2 Chronicles 36:13

It is God who gives the impulse to conversion, that is, it is God who first moves man toward repentance and conversion. “*I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: **turn thou me, and I shall be turned**; for thou art the LORD my God.*” Jeremiah 31:18 “***Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned**; renew our days as of old.*” Lamentations 5:21 “*In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; **if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth**;*” 2 Timothy 2:25 It is God who first initiates in grace toward man, but man can resist and reject this gracious act of kindness toward him. Man still does have free will.

So *strephe* in itself meant to turn to God. And whenever the hearer heard the message they knew exactly what was expected of them. The same thing applied with *epistrephe*, especially for believers to turn to God, or to return to God and start drawing near to God. And for us it referred to start living in the spiritual life once again. When *apostrephe* was used it meant the same thing as *epistrephe*, except emphasis was laid on the things that they were involved in that was holding them back, so they needed to turn from these things so they could turn to God. It was all a part of the dynamic of turning.

Metanoeo is another word used in the matter of **repentance**, but the concept behind its meaning is not the turning of the soul, but **a changing of one's thinking and attitude!** *Strepho* and *metanoeo* were frequently used with each other and often as synonymous terms, but there was a difference. *Strepho* would be the all encompassing term concerning repentance, while *metanoeo* would be the term used that looked at one aspect of it.

Obviously one could not turn to God, or return to him as the case may be, and we're looking at this from the standpoint of Christians repenting, unless there has been a complete and total change of mind about the believer's involvement in the world system, his flesh nature activity, the things of the devil and his attitude concerning learning Bible Doctrine in a local church.

If the unbeliever is in view there first must be a change of mental attitude about Jesus Christ, who he is, what he's done for us and where the unbeliever stands as a sinner under condemnation, that he's on his way to Hell and that he must come to Christ in faith to be saved. Once he has that change of mental attitude, which is what repentance is, then he will turn to Christ and come to him to be saved.

Now when most people hear the word **repent**, they immediately think that means they are to feel sorry for their sins! But that's not what the Greek word *metanoeo* means. *Metanoeo* meant to change the mind, not feel sorry about something. When the Bible was translated into English, the translators chose the English word *repent*, which had its origin from the Middle English word *repenten* from around 1250–1300, which is found in the Old French *repentir* from *re + pentir* - to be contrite, which goes back to the Latin *rēpent* - stem of *rēpēns*, the present participle of rēpere - to crawl, to creep, which resulted in the following present day ideas of what people mistakenly think repentance is all about: to feel remorse for; to be contrite about; show penitence for, to feel sorry, to feel regret, self-reproach, to be contrite for past conduct; regret or be conscience-stricken about a past action, attitude, etc..

Now that's what the English word *repent* means, but that's not what the Greek word *metanoeo*, which is the word used in the Bible, means! *Metanoeo* simply meant to change the mind! Now if one wanted to denote such ideas as feeling sorry for what you have done, feeling regret over past actions, (and we all have had some of those), to feel guilty, or to have remorse and sorrow, and even to connote acts of penance, then there is a Greek word that addresses those ideas and it's *metamelomai!*

But here's where we have to make an important distinction. It does not follow that if one has had a change of mental attitude, that they will necessarily regret their actions! Repentance, *metanoeo*, does not always end up in feeling sorry over something. And it does not follow that just because one regrets what they have done that they have had a change of mental attitude! Repentance does not always mean there is regret and regret does not mean that there has been repentance, as was the case with Judas.

Here we get into the psychological makeup of different people, when we talk about the idea of regret versus repentance. Some people's repentance will be accompanied by tears, sorrow and regret. While other people's repentance will not be accompanied by any of them! Yet they both have the same thing in common; they have had a change of mental attitude toward God, his Son and his Word. People are different and how they react emotionally to certain things differs from person to person.

In many Christian circles today the whole emphasis is placed on feeling sorry for one's sins in this matter of repentance, (another carry over from the mother goddess cult), which really gets into the idea of regret. **But regretting your actions, even when accompanied by tears, does not mean that you have had a change of mind!** See Esau and Judas as examples of that.

We want to emphasize an important concept in a believer having a change of mind and that is **this change of mind will want to know the truth!** They will now want to know the truth, serve the truth, and pursue after the truth their entire lives. Truth will be paramount in their lives! Not a religious denomination, not after some particular school of theology – but the truth.

Another concept found in having true repentance, that is, a true change of mind, is that **it will result in the individual having an *epignosis* knowledge of God's Word.** *Epignosis* knowledge comes from the believer in Christ metabolizing the teaching of God's Word by faith. *“In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;” 2 Timothy 2:25* *“Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.” 2 Timothy 2:25 NIV*

When an **unbeliever repents** and believes on Christ as his Savior, a changing of the mind, turning to Christ and believing on him, then that new believer will be brought to a local church by the Holy Spirit where he can sit under the teaching of the Word of God and start metabolizing it by faith. His change of mind has resulted in him getting *epignosis* doctrine.

When a **believer in Christ** has got away from the Word, drifted off course in his life, gone back out into the world, got wrapped up in carnal living, or simply got involved in some church group that doesn't teach the Word of God, and I mean teach, where its format isn't entertainment, programs, etc., but teaching Bible doctrine, and he or she has a change of mental attitude, (true repentance), that believer will end up under a church ministry that does teach the Word resulting in *epignosis* for them.

B. Repentance applies to believers as well as unbelievers.

Repentance for the Gentile unbeliever entails that he has a change of mental attitude about him being a sinner, that he is on his way to Hell and needs to be saved, that Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world, that Christ is God manifested in the flesh, that he died for our sins and was raised from the dead, and that they need to believe on him as their Savior. **Repentance for the Jewish unbeliever** means that he has had a change of mental attitude about the same concepts concerning Jesus Christ, but he also needs to believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah of Israel. **Repentance for the believer in Christ** entails that they have a change of mental attitude about the doctrinal teaching of the Word of God and their involvement in the flesh and world system, that they need to start attending a doctrinal church some place or sitting under the ministry of a doctrinal Pastor-Teacher, and start living in the spiritual life dynamic.

C. God uses his communicators to help bring about repentance and conversion.

God brought in the **prophets** in the OT **to point out to the Israelites how far they had strayed from the path and what they needed to do to get back on it!** *“Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations.” Nehemiah 9:26*

They were told that they **had to turn from their evil ways** so they could return to the Lord. *“Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD.” Zechariah 1:4*

The prophets **pointed out the various activities** they were involved in that not only offended God, but prevented them from walking with the Lord. *“Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood.”* Hosea 4:1,2

They pointed out what **the core problem** in all this and that was because there was *“no **truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.**”* That is, there was no teaching of Bible doctrine, no grace and no *epignosis* knowledge of God, that is, doctrinal teaching that has been metabolized by faith by the believer.

The prophets also pointed out that **the people were being destroyed because of their rejection of God's Word!** *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast **rejected knowledge,** I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”* Hosea 4:6

In the NT today God uses **Pastor-Teachers** in the local church to help bring about repentance and conversion. They do this by their faithful and patient grace teaching of Bible Doctrine in the hope that God will grant these erring believers a true change of mental attitude resulting in them learning the Word, living the faith rest life and metabolizing Bible doctrine by faith. *“In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; **if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;**”* 2 Timothy 2:25

D. Repentance in the churches.

Paul brings up this matter of repentance in 2 Corinthians 7:8-11 and what its effect was in these believer's lives. I'm not going to cover all the exegesis in this study for it requires a separate series all its own, but we can look at the effects of what true repentance brings in the souls and lives of believers. *“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”* 2 Corinthians 7:10

What **carefulness** – *spoude*. *Spoude* has the idea of really putting yourself out to do something, or for a person or purpose. It denotes the idea of the believer in Christ being **highly motivated** for the things of the Lord, that is, the Lord, his Word, his grace, the local church, serving the Lord, etc..

What **clearing of yourselves** – *apologia*. *Apologia* was a verbal defense of something and here it refers to standing up for the things of Christ. The believer that has had a true change of mental attitude will stand up for God, his Word, his grace, his Son, the truth, for what's right, etc.. Instead of going along with the evil around him, (which he was a part of before his repentance), **he now stands up for what is right and defends it by opening his mouth and speaking doctrinal truths!**

What **indignation** – *aganaktēsis*. *Aganaktēsis* is anger aroused over evil, or what we call righteous indignation. Before one repented they were so caught up in the world system around them, flesh nature living and perhaps even the things of the devil, that they condoned and defended the evil in society. They were a part of the evil! But after repentance they now are **indignant**. At one time they loved that which was evil and hated that which is good, but now they are back to loving that which is good and hating that which is evil! *“Hate the **evil,** and **love** the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.”* Amos 5:15

What **fear** – *phobos*. *Phobos* here deals with a healthy fear of the Lord. “*What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose.*” Psalm 25:12 The fear of the Lord is having a healthy respect for him. God is compassionate, gracious, kind, merciful and loving, but he still is a God of holiness and justice. So, because of his holiness, we have a healthy fear of his judgments and order our lives accordingly. Before we didn't care and did our own things in life. But now, after this change of attitude, we want to live in a manner pleasing to him.

What **vehement desire** – *epithēsis*. *Epithēsis* spoke of having an intensive longing for something or someone. In personal relationships it would speak of having a longing to see a beloved relative or friend that you hadn't seen in a long time. Here it's a longing for the things of Christ to be established in and around your life, your church, family, nation, etc..

What **zeal** – *zelos*. *Zelos* denoted having a fervent desire along certain lines. A concept that did not just entail desire, but one that was backed up by the will and activity. Here it refers to **having a renewed interest and zeal for the things of the Lord to the place where one now wholeheartedly throws himself into Christian activity centering around the Word and living the Christian life.**

What **revenge** – *ekdikēsis*. *Ekdikēsis* is that which proceeds out of justice, out of that which is right and fair. It refers to the believer now wants to see justice done in life. **After their change of mind, they want that which is right and fair to be established in life.**

*“For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what **carefulness** it wrought in you, yea, what **clearing of yourselves**, yea, what **indignation**, yea, what **fear**, yea, what **vehement desire**, yea, what **zeal**, yea, what **revenge!** In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.” 2 Corinthians 7:11*

Christ commanded the believers in **Ephesus** to repent because they had left their first love.

*“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and **repent**, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou **repent.**” Revelation 2:4,5*

Many believers have mistakenly assumed that repentance is just for the unsaved, but we see it also applies to believers, who have gone wandering away from the Lord and living in the spiritual life. Our first love is Jesus Christ, who, when we first saved, loved him with all our hearts. We loved him and his Word; we were thankful for his grace; overwhelmed by his forgiveness; and we had a willingness to do whatever he wanted us to do in life. But after awhile many believers started to become interested in the things of the world and drifted away from him. They may still attend a church, but their hearts are not with him like they once were.

One of the factors in Christian repentance is to look back where we once were in our lives in our walk with the Lord and where we are now. Has our Christian walk become one of ritual, routine, duty, going through the motions, or is our heart not in it any more! We need to look where we once were and realize how far we have fallen from that.

The Lord tells them to have a change of mental attitude and start doing the things that they used to do, when their love for him was strong. That is, instead of being occupied with their own agendas in life, they need to start having their activities in life center around the will of God. Going to church, studying Bible doctrine, living by faith, doing the Father's will, etc..

But this also comes with a warning! If they don't, then he is going to remove the lamp stand from its place. That is, close down the local grace, doctrinal church. The doctrinal local church is the candlestick from which the light of God's Word shines out into the world.

Christ commands the believers in **Pergamos** to repent. *“Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”* Revelation 2:16 Pergamos was where the throne of Satan was, an altar to Zeus. (It is now in east Berlin). The believers there were under continual pressure and Antipas was martyred there.

But they had got caught up in some practices that were highly offensive to the Lord: following the teaching of Balaam, eating sacrifices to idols, committing fornication, which was probably having sex with temple priestesses and holding to the teachings of the Nicolaitans.

They also were commanded to repent with a warning! If they don't, then Christ will come to them with severe discipline. These warnings, the prospect of discipline and call to repentance applied to all the other churches, if they followed their pattern and they apply to us today! *“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”* Revelation 2:17

There was also a call to repentance to that self-proclaimed prophetess, **Jezebel**, who was leading God's men into fornication, the eating of idol sacrifices and adultery, probably spiritual adultery. This warning came with severe consequences, great afflictions and death. *“And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.”* Revelation 2:21,22

Christ commands a number of the believers in **Sardis** to repent. *“Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.”* Revelation 3:3

Apparently some of the believers there had started living the Christian life, but never went on in it. The defiled robes point to the idea that at one time they were living in the new nature that God had created in them, but lapsed back into living in the flesh and being occupied with the world system. *“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.”* Revelation 3:4

Christ also commands the believers living in **Laodicea**, which also applies to the believers living in the Laodicean phase of the Church Age, which has direct application to Christianity today – to repent! *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.”* Revelation 3:19 To get a better understanding of this go to my Online study at www.pacificrimbible.com of “The Laodicean Church”. But we can highlight some of the points and problems of this final stage of the Church Age.

These believers were neither cold nor hot. They were not “on fire” for the things of the Lord and his Word, as we would say, nor were they as cold as unbelievers. They had become complacent in their Christian life. They had the appearance of being positive to the things of God, they went to church going through all the motions and acting like Christians, but their hearts were not sold out for the Lord. Their Christianity was more Churchianity! It had come down to the place of keeping up appearances, as we see so much of today, but they had lost their love for the Word.

They were totally involved in Satan's world system. Money, material possessions, homes, clothes, success, prosperity, careers, the things that the world offers, were what motivated them, and what they were proud of, but not God's Word and serving the Lord. They had great zeal, passion and drive for the things of the world, but not the things of the Lord. And they had their church to "hide behind" to give the appearance they did love the Lord and his Word.

They had not only rejected Bible doctrine, but they were caught up in self-deception and denial. They could not "see" the truth about themselves. That's why Christ recommended that they get spiritual eye-salve so they could see the truth.

The problem is explicitly described in verse twenty where Christ, the living Word, describes himself as being **outside their church(s)** knocking on the door so they would invite him in. "*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.*" Revelation 3:20 They had their churchianity going, their programs, religious structures, singing, entertainment and the rest of it, but the most important thing they kept out of the church – the Word of God!

Christ commands them to be zealous and repent! They need a complete change of mental attitude about the pace of Bible doctrine in their church. They need to throw out all their man-made nonsense and get back to the teaching of God's Word. And they need to be zealous for the things of the Lord, not for their own things, nor the things of the world.

Now when we read our Bibles and come across the words having **turn** in them, to turn to, to turn from, to turn to God, to return to God, we need to see that they're all speaking of the same dynamic, only looking at them from different perspectives. Also whenever we see the expressions of to turn to, to turn from, to turn to God and to return to God, we also need to see that the idea of **repentance**, or **having a change of mind, is involved in this matter of turning**. And whenever we see the words to **repent**, or repentance, we need to see that what is involved in the concept of repentance is **a turning to God, or a returning to God**, as the case may be.

If the command to **repent** is directed at **unbelievers**, whether in the OT or NT, then it is speaking of them turning to Christ in faith for salvation. If the command to **repent** is directed at **believers**, then it is speaking of them turning their souls to him once again to walk in the spiritual life dynamic of faith in the Word and the filling of the Holy Spirit. **Repentance** for the believer is them having a complete change of mind about God, his Word, his grace, living in the true spiritual life dynamic and turning their souls back to him and the things of Christ once again.

But here's where another important concept comes in regarding this matter of repentance and a turning to God, and one that is so commonly mistaken today, and that is when we speak of God we are not left to conjecture in this matter of what **our opinion** of God and the Christian way of life is! Conjecture is the formation of an opinion or theory without sufficient evidence or proof. **Unbelievers are not left up to their own devices of what they think God is all about!** He has revealed himself in his Word. And **Christians are not left up to their own devices as to what they think the spiritual life is all about and to what churches should be doing!** Christians and their churches today, (which are more social clubs than anything), have replaced the sound theology of what the Bible teaches on Christian living and what the format of churches are to be doing with their own opinions, viewpoint and emotions. They have replaced the true spiritual life dynamic and the true Christian way of life with one of their own making. It is spiritual conjecture and it is spiritual idolatry.

What is an idol? Some will state the obvious that it is a carving or statue of a deity, which is really not a deity or God, but a fallen angel. But an idol is where someone takes an idea, thought, imagination, or an emotion from their own mind of what they think is a deity or God! And from that idea they have come up with they carve it into wood, sculpt it into stone, or mold it into their lives in some form. And remember, **an idol was not just an object of worship, but an object of security!**

Whenever you find the various religious programmings going on in churches today, you will find that all these concepts that have replaced the sound teaching and preaching of God's Word exist today as an expression of what is going on in **their** minds, but not from a careful exegesis and analysis of God's Word! They have created an idol, even if it isn't in stone or wood. It exists in their churches because of their thinking, their opinions, or their emotions.

So **when the message of repentance is directed toward Christians**, it will mean that they will have to rethink their involvement in the world system, their living in the flesh and not the Spirit, their self righteous legalism and all the religiosity going on in their churches and personal lives, have a total change of mental attitude about it, turn away from all these things completely and get under the grace teaching of God's Word, or get back under it if they have wandered from it.

When unbelievers are commanded to repent and turn to Christ for their forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation, it's not to turn to a false Christ, or one that is a figment of their imagination, but to the true Jesus Christ! And the true Christ can only be revealed by a true and correct presentation of him that comes from an accurate teaching of God's Word! And in addition to that, they must be accurately told what is needed to be saved and that is faith alone in Christ alone!

E. Turning from evil.

As we have seen repentance and conversion go hand in hand. **Repentance**, having a change of mind, is a part of the larger concept of conversion, with **conversion** referring to the turning of the soul to God, or a returning of the soul to God, if there was already a relationship in place with God. But in this turning to God, there is also the idea of turning from something!

In Malachi 3:7 the Israelites had turned away from the decrees of the Lord and were not keeping them. So they are commanded to return to him, which would entail them coming back to the place of taking in the Word of God and applying it to their lives. *“Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. **Return unto me**, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?”*

We see this idea very clearly in 2 Chronicles 7:14, where this passage is not directed at unbelievers, which so many Christians mistakenly apply it, but to the people of God! In this passage we see **repentance**, a **turning of the soul** to God once again, **humility** and a **turning from their wicked ways** all involved in the same concept. *“If **my people**, which are called by my name, shall **humble themselves**, and pray, and **seek my face**, and **turn from their wicked ways**; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”*

Jeremiah talked about **repentance**, (having a change of mind), **turning to God** and **turning from evil**, (the ideas found in conversion), so a nation will not come under God's judgment. *“If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, **turn from their evil**, I will repent of the evil, (change of mind), that I thought to do unto them.” Jeremiah 18:8*

One of the more prominent cases of believers needing to turn from the evil they are involved in so they can repent is found in Hebrews 6:1-6, “*Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of **repentance** from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; **seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh**, and put him to an open shame.*”

What this passage dealt with is some Christians, for a variety of reasons, had left the church and gone back into the temple to worship. **But what the temple and its sacrifices stood for is the denial that Jesus Christ had paid the one time complete penalty for sin!** So when they went to the temple they were crucifying the Son of God afresh! For them to have a change of mind, that is, to be brought to a place of repentance they had to turn from the entire temple system.

The present active participle of to crucify again would be taking place at the same time of renewing them to repentance, which is to say, that **it is impossible to bring them to that place of repentance, as long as, or while they are crucifying the Lord afresh**, or as long as they are going back to the temple! They had to completely turn from that.

F. God grants, and motivates toward repentance.

It is God who gives the desire, motivation and the ability to repent and return to him. “**Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old.**” Lamentations 5:21 It is very clear that God is the initiator in this matter. “*Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that **the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?**”* Romans 2:4 “*In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; **if God peradventure will give them repentance** to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.*” 2 Timothy 2:24,25

But believers often refuse to repent and turn their souls back to him, his Word and the true spiritual life because, **one**, of their pride, and **two**, because they will not turn from the evil they have been involved in! So God implements discipline in their lives, thus making them **miserable**, so they will be motivated to return to him and the blessings he has in store for them. “*Come, and **let us return unto the LORD**: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.*” Hosea 6:1,2

But believers can become so **entrapped by the evil** they got themselves into that it will hinder or prevent them from returning to their walk with the Lord and living in the spiritual life he has for them. “***Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God.** A spirit of prostitution is in their heart; they do not acknowledge the LORD.*” Hosea 5:4 NIV

The believer can get so caught up in his **pride** that he will refuse to repent and turn his soul back to God and his Word. Much has been written in the OT and NT about stiff-necked-believers, which was what the case was with Zedekiah, who became king at 21 years of age and reigned until he was 32 years old. Notice how young he was when he was lifted up with pride. “*And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he **stiffened his neck**, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel.*” 2 Chronicles 36:13

A turning away from evil as one turned back to God was a part of the concept of **repentance**, as we see with ancient Israel. *“Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; **Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.**”* Ezekiel 14:6

A turning away from a particular sin, or sins, that is dragging one down is also a part of having this change of mind. *“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. **Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.**”* Ezekiel 18:30

We see this concept also in the NT, even to the dealing with our mental attitudes. For example, we are not to let ourselves get caught up with **bitterness** for that will cause us to fall short of the grace life God has for us. *“**Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;**”* Hebrews 12:15 **Our responsibility is to find out if we are bitter and then get it out of our system!**

We can have the same problem with other areas in the **anger complex**, such as, resentment, anger, arguments and the rest. We are to get rid of these things as well. *“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”* Ephesians 4:31,32

Another big area is having an **authority problem** stemming out of our own personal **pride**. Here repentance would be placing oneself under the authority of God, his Word, the local church and the home *“Likewise, ye younger, **submit** yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for **God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.**”* 1 Peter 5:5,6

Because it is in the nature of our flesh to wander off from God in our daily living, we need to keep short accounts with him, be constantly turning away from evil and always be watching out for the matter of personal pride and an evil heart of unbelief. *“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ **depart from iniquity.**”* 2 Timothy 2:19 *“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an **evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.**”* Hebrews 3:12

God has ordained that we be conformed to the image of his Son, *“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be **conformed** to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”* Romans 8:29 He does not want us to be like those in the world, *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye **transformed** by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”* Romans 12:2

But believers do get caught up in the things of the flesh and the world. So in grace God provides for us confession of sin, 1 John 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* the teaching of Bible doctrine, and the spiritual life dynamic in the new nature. And if or when we turn our backs on these things, he also provides for us a way back through a change of mental attitude and a turning of the soul back to him once again. But we've got to check our pride, turn from evil and turn our souls back to him and his Word once again.

Pastor Mike

