

REPENTANCE

Ezekiel 18:21-22, Luke 13:3

By Raymond White

At the core of the Christian faith is repentance. The mere act of changing one's mind and behavior goes a long way to undoing the damage of our folly. That repentance works is strong evidence for divine intervention. How else can we explain the wonderful effectiveness of simple repentance? Here is my list of verses about this divine promise.

[1] OLD TESTAMENT

1 Kings 8:47-53 Yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness; :49 Then hear thou their prayer...:50 And forgive thy people that have sinned against thee...

Proverbs 28:13 He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

If you are seeking forgiveness, the first thing to do is to acknowledge your sin, and the second thing to do is to stop. In other words, a show of sincerity would be nice.

Jeremiah 8:6 ...no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?

The very first step to repentance is to feel the guilt for what you've been doing.

Lamentations 3:40 Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD.

Repent, again. Yet one more time, and maybe we'll finally get it right.

Ezekiel 9:4 And the LORD said unto him [Ezekiel], God through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. :5 And to the others he said in my hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity.. :6 Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house.

The city is about to be destroyed for its wickedness, but God gives a special protection to those who at least lament that their sins have brought them to this. Most "sinners" never grieve at all, never understand what the fuss is all about. But there are some who "get it," who understand that sin is sin and is something to sigh and cry about. They are protected. Everyone else is doomed

Ezekiel 18:21 *But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. :22 All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done she shall live.*

Ezekiel 20:43 *And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed.*

Ezekiel 33:15 *If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die.*

Ezekiel 36:31 *Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.*

True repentance involves more than stopping your sins, it involves loathing your sins and yourself for having done them.

Ezekiel 43:11 *And if they be ashamed of all that they have done...*

Daniel 4:27 *Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness...*

Zechariah 1:3 *...Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you...*

[2] NEW TESTAMENT

Luke 13:3 *... except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

Acts 11:18 *... repentance unto life.*

Repentance is a necessary thing. Without it we die. With it we live. What is remarkable is that it works at all. One might think that mistakes are final and their consequences inevitable. Not so. Repentance changes everything and God accepts it.

Acts 25:13 *And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus. :20 ... repent ... :23 And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice ... 26:30 And when he [Paul] had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice ...*

Paul's message here is three-fold: [1] Jesus rose from the dead, therefore [2] accept him and [3] repent.

To whom was Paul preaching this message? To Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice. And there's a stunning message of grace here. Festus and Agrippa we know. Festus was governor and Agrippa was king. But who was Bernice? Was she a nobody just tagging along? Wherever Agrippa was, there was Bernice. Who was she? She must have been somebody important, else why the frequent mention? Luke doesn't say. I wager because he doesn't want to say. But Josephus tells us who she was, and I give you fair warning, you might not like it.

Bernice was two things: she was Agrippa's sister, and she was also his lover, his mistress. They were an incestuous couple and it was no secret.

What does that have to do with repentance? Just this: Paul asked them to repent and offered them forgiveness. They didn't accept it, but that was their choice. My point is that Paul offered — forgiveness was available even to this extra-ordinarily sinful couple.

There are some people we just suppose are so bad that they are beyond God's grace, like Paul who killed Christians. The surprise is, they are not. Not Paul, not Agrippa, and not Bernice, *if* they repent.

[3] NOT AN OPTION

People came to John the Baptist for baptism. Among the crowd were some Pharisees and Sadducees also seeking baptism.

Matthew 3:7 When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Vipers are deadly snakes that live in the ground. When field stubble was burned, vipers left their holes and fled from the fire like any other animal. Were these Pharisees and Sadducees really fleeing from wrath or did they have another motive? John wanted to know, so he asked them. "Who told you to flee? Why are you here? What brought you out of your holes? Are you really fleeing from wrath or are you here for some other reason, like it's the trendy thing to do?"

Well, there was only one way to discover their true motive.

Matthew 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.

That's how to know what's really motivating someone's "conversion." Will they repent or not? John was asking them, do you intend to repent or are you just trying to justify yourself? These Pharisees failed John's test.

Luke 7:30 But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves being not baptized of him.

They might as well have left, baptism didn't mean a thing without repentance and a changed life.

Sometimes a zealous missionary will baptized an unrepented sinner. John would never have done that. He demanded to see the fruits first, then came baptism. Also, they came —

Matthew 3:6 confessing their sins.

Confession is wonderful, but not without repentance. King Saul said (*1 Samuel 15:24*) *I have sinned*. Pharaoh said (*Exodus 9:7*) *I have sinned*. But so what? Without a changed life his confession meant nothing.

Why did the Pharisees and Sadducees come to John? Probably because it was trendy, the latest thing to do. John was the newest celebrity in town and they didn't want to miss out.

Pharisees and Sadducees were very different from each other. The Pharisees were trying to earn heaven with their rules. The Sadducees were quite sure there was no heaven and so they were trying to get it all here. John told them both to repent.

In fairness to the Pharisees, at least a few did come to Jesus Christ. Nicodemus (*John 19:39*), and Joseph (*John 19:38*). But sadly about the Sadducees, not a single one of them was recorded to ever come to Christ. I suppose that means something.