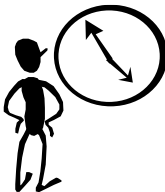


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.
(every other week)	

Wednesday:

Bible Study	6:30 p. m.
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Repent of Your Sins

By Nana Yaw Aidoo

Over and over again, the New Testament emphasizes the necessity of repentance in the salvation of humans. The first preacher in the New Testament is John the Baptizer. We are told that he was sent to prepare the way for the Lord (Mark 1:3), and in so doing, he preached repentance for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4). Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, also during His ministry, preached a message of repentance in order to be saved. To some Jews, he warned, “... *except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*” (Luke 13:3, 5). Just before His ascension, Jesus Christ, in giving to His apostles the great commission, also spoke of the preaching of “*repentance and remission of sins...in his name among all nations*” (Luke 24:47). Furthermore, on the first day that the church of Christ began, Peter under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in response to the query of some Jews on what to do to be saved, mentioned repentance as part of the requirements (Acts 2:38). Then to the scholars of Athens, Paul preached that God commands “*all men everywhere to repent*” (Acts 17:30). That repentance is necessary to be saved can be denied by no one willing to be led by the word of God.

"Some protestants, however, apparently teach that if someone must repent to be saved, then repentance becomes a work on that person's part. And since the Bible teaches that salvation is a gift and not a result of works, no one should tell another person that he or she must repent to be saved" ["Question 422"].

There is also the idea that repentance isn't necessary to be saved but is rather a result of being saved. Listen to Calvinism's greatest defender of the 21st century, the late R.C. Sproul:

"If we asked one hundred Christians to answer this question, 'Which comes first, regeneration or repentance?' I imagine that ninety out of a hundred would say repentance comes first. However, it doesn't make sense that people who are dead in their sins and trespasses would incline themselves naturally to repentance. The New Testament teaches that God the Holy Spirit first

quickens our souls, making us alive spiritually, and the fruit of this work is godly repentance and faith" [Sproul ch. 4].

But does not Jesus Christ say, "*Except ye repent, ye shall...perish?*" Also, why would God command, as Paul suggests in Acts 17:30, all people to do something He does for them? Repentance is clearly something that is commanded of humans and, as such, cannot be something that God does for them. Wallace was right in saying that "In the very nature of things, and in the stern commands of God through all of his preachers in every dispensation, repentance is imperative" [Wallace 199].

Having established the necessity of repentance in the salvation of sinners, it behooves us to learn what it entails so that we can do it. However, to learn what repentance is, we must first know what it isn't.

What Repentance Is Not

First, repentance isn't feeling sorry for doing wrong.

While it is true that there can be no repentance without feeling sorry for the wrong that was done, sorrow (even if it is genuine) in and of itself isn't repentance. We learn this from the words of Paul: "*For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death*" (II Corinthians 7:10). This statement shows conclusively that sorrow, even godly sorrow, defined by Jimmy Allen as "being sorry before God for what one has done whether anybody else knows about it or not" (16:51-55), is not repentance but rather something that produces or leads to repentance. Is it not true that countless people have shown remorse for wrong, not because they were sorry for what they had done but merely because they had been caught and had to pay the price for their wrong? Such people would do the same thing repeatedly if they knew they wouldn't be caught. For sure, they have shown remorse, but no right-thinking person would suggest that they have repented of their sin merely because such people have shown remorse.

A prime example of this is Saul, the first king of Israel. In all of Scripture, no person probably showed remorse more times than him. In I Samuel 15:24, he said, "*I have sinned.*" In 1 Samuel 15:30, he said, "*I have sinned.*" And in I Samuel 26:21, he said, "*I have sinned.*" Yet he did nothing about his numerous sins and continued to do the very things he felt sorry for doing when he was caught.

Feeling the right kind of sorrow for wrongdoing will produce repentance. However, sorrow in and of itself isn't repentance.

Second, repentance isn't a changed life.

I remember taking this position in a class I once taught on the Book of Acts, to which one brother claimed that by making this statement, I had made repentance a noun instead of a verb, that is, a mere name instead of something to do. This brother wouldn't listen to anything I had to say because he had mistakenly equated repentance with what repentance produces. People like this fail to consider that a person can change or reform his or her life without repenting of sin.

Take, for example, the case of an atheist who quits visiting the brothel so that he can

save more money to take care of his ailing mother. This person doesn't believe that Christ died for his sins and wouldn't even allow anyone to tell him the story of the old rugged cross. Yet, so he can save money to help his mother, he quits fornicating. Has he changed his life? Yes. Has he repented of his sin? Certainly not. He quit fornicating not because he felt sorry for sinning but just so that he could take care of his mother.

To be sure, just as godly sorrow leads to repentance, so repentance leads to a changed life. If a person has truly repented of drunkenness, he or she will quit drinking alcohol either in public or in the comfort of his or her home. If an individual has truly repented of robbing God in giving, he/she will start to give as God has prospered him or her. If a man has truly repented of cohabitation or fornication, he would separate himself from the lady and quit sleeping with her. And if a woman has truly repented of immodest dressing, she would start covering herself well, from her shoulders to her knees. One cannot keep on telling lies and maliciously gossiping about others and say that he or she has repented of sin. True repentance will certainly produce a changed life. However, a changed life in and of itself isn't repentance but rather the **fruit** or effect of repentance. This we learn from John the Baptizer when he told some people to "*Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance*" (Luke 3:8). Also, we learn this from Paul's defense before Agrippa II when he separated repentance from its fruit:

"Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:19-20, Emph. NYA).

Did Paul make a mistake when he separated repentance from the works of repentance? Certainly not. The apostle knew that a changed life was the result of repentance. However, he also knew that a changed life, or the works of repentance, is not repentance itself. Hence, he knew to separate repentance from what repentance produces. Repentance, as J.W. McGarvey aptly noted, "is something that stands in between sorrow for sin and the change of the life in which sins are abandoned and a better course of conduct begun" [McGarvey 100].

What Is Repentance?

Repentance, then, is a significant change in the mind or will of a person. The Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*, comes from two words: *meta*, which means after, and *noia*, the verb form of *nous*, which means mind. R.C. Sproul makes this illuminating observation:

"In its simplest form, the term *metanoia* has to do with 'the mind afterward,' or, as we might say, 'an afterthought.' In the Greek language, it came to mean "a significant changing of one's mind." So, in the most rudimentary sense, the concept of repentance in the Bible means 'to change one's mind'" [Sproul ch. 1].

That this is true is amply illustrated by our Lord in Matthew 21:28-29 when he told the chief priests and elders of the Jews, "*But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.*" Notice that Christ did not merely say that the first son repented. Neither did He merely say that he went. Rather, Christ said the son **repented and went**. The son, eventually going, was not an act of repentance. Repentance

occurred before the son went. What did the son do when he repented? He simply said, "I will do it." Initially, he had said, **I will not**, but then he changed his mind and said, **I will**. Having thus changed his mind and will, he went. This is the difference between one who has repented and one who hasn't. The one who has repented says to himself, "I will do God's will," and the one who hasn't says, "I will not do God's will."

The difference between repentance and impenitence is the difference of one word. The word "not" spells the difference between rebellion and disobedience on one hand and submission and obedience to God on the other. When a man who is living in sin determines to abandon his life of sin, when he says, "I will quit sin—I will sin no more," he has repented [Wallace 196].

The same is seen in the parable of the prodigal son. After he had wasted all his portion of his father's wealth on riotous living, Jesus Christ said, "*he came to himself*" (Luke 15:17), and when he did, he said, "*I will arise and go to my father*" (Luke 15:18). By telling himself **I will** arise and go, he had repented. This was the moment of repentance because this is when he changed his mind and will. This was preceded by godly sorrow or the realization that he had "*sinned against heaven*" and his father (Luke 15:18) and followed by action, where he actually did arise and go to his father (Luke 15:20). Hence, while a changed life resulted from the prodigal son's repentance, the changed life was not the point of repentance. He first had to be sorry for what he had done and then change his mind or will before he could bear fruit or take action.

Repentance, therefore, is a significant change in the mind or will of a person.

The Hardest Command to Obey

This very act of significantly changing one's mind or will to do God's will is, as some have very correctly noted, "the hardest command to obey" [Wallace 193]. This is so because it has to do with "a change of that stubborn will which is the seat of all rebellion and all sin against God" [McGarvey 100]. There is a stubbornness in the will of humans when it comes to doing God's bidding (cf. Jeremiah 17:9), and it is this stubbornness that is "the greatest obstacle in the way of man's salvation" [Wallace 193]. It is easy to succumb to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life even when we know in our heart of hearts that it is wrong. Paul spoke of a point in his life when he was willing to do right and yet not do it (Romans 7:18). Jimmy Allen also, in speaking about repentance, said it is the hardest thing God ever asked him to do and the hardest thing anyone would ever do,

"Because when you repent, you surrender, you yield, you acquiesce, you quit fighting against God, you stack your arms of rebellion, you become a living dead person, you say, 'I'll become dead to my own aspirations and ambitions, and I'll become alive to Your will, Your direction, and Your guidance' ... it's learning to hate what you used to love and love what you used to hate, it's taking all you are, all you have, all you ever expect to be, all you ever expect to have, and place it on the altar of sacrifice and say, 'Lord it's Yours, from the top of my head to the sole of my feet, heart, soul, mind, strength, body, it's all yours. Just speak, and I'll do whatever you say'" [31:54-33:06].

Even the best of us struggle with the obstinacy of the will. However, "When a man is

so thoroughly filled with sorrow and mourning and self-reproach on account of his sins that his will is subdued to the will of God, and he says, I will sin no more, I will hereafter submit to the will of my God, this results in a change of his life, and it is repentance — a change of will in regard to sin" [McGarvey 100].

How Long Does It Take for One to Repent?

At this point, someone might ask, "How long does it have to take to repent of sin?" In response, may I present to you J.W. McGarvey's answer to the question since I cannot improve on it:

"As soon as a man is convinced that he is a sinner against God, he ought that very hour to be sorry, and sorry enough to abandon his sins, and to resolve that he will never sin again, God helping him. Whenever you have gotten to the point that your will is subdued, you have sorrowed long enough; and when you have reached that point, you have sorrowed intensely enough. So that all of this conception of long-continued sorrow and mourning and anguish, causing sleep to depart, causing troubled dreams to visit you in the night — all this results from the fact that the will is so stubborn that it takes hours and weeks of anguish to break it down — to make the guilty, stubborn rebel, willing to submit to his God. God takes no delight in the tears, in the pains, in the agonies of the human heart. He takes delight in quick and willing obedience; and all he wants any man to do is to come to him in willing obedience. 'Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest.' That is the sweet and heavenly invitation of the Lord Jesus Christ" [McGarvey 107].

Since repentance is a significant change in the mind or will of a person, the length of time required to repent is "Just long enough to determine to quit sin" [Wallace 197].

Conclusion

To be saved, you need to repent of your sins. Repentance answers whether you will be lord over your life or whether Jesus will be Lord over your life. And until you realize that either Jesus is Lord over all aspects of your life or he isn't Lord at all, you will never obey the command to repent of your sins to be saved. Let me end by saying this. While repentance is required to be saved, repentance alone is not enough. On the day of Pentecost, when the auditors of Peter's sermon were "*pricked in their heart*" and asked what to do to be forgiven of their sins, Peter responded by saying, "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*" (Acts 2:38). We are to repent for the remission of sins, and we are to be baptized for the remission of sins. There is no salvation after repentance and before baptism. Hence, "repent and be baptized...for the remission of sins." If you are reading this and you aren't a Christian, there is no reason why you should spurn the opportunity to be saved today from this crooked and perverse generation (Acts 2:40).

"We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation)" (II Corinthians 6:1-2).