

Repentance part 2

Peter Ditzel

This is the final part of an article adapted and revised from *The Word of His Grace* radio program, "Repentance" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/audio/repentance.mp3>) that originally aired in 2005.

We Have Brought Our Sufferings on Ourselves

So we see that we as a race are the direct cause of many of our own miseries. Ever since the Fall of man in the Garden of Eden, we are sinful by nature, and this causes us to be greedy, covetous, murderous, adulterous, warlike, and generally lawless. I am not saying that we all have all of these tendencies to the fullest degree possible. But we all naturally have them to one degree or another, and, of course, we affect each other. I may never have stolen anything, but if someone steals my car, I am affected by someone else's sin. And other people are affected by my sins.

Before Adam sinned, there was no death. Life was idyllic. Suffering and death started only after Adam sinned. Did it come by God's pronouncement? Yes. But that was in response to man's action—man's sin. God had warned Adam what would happen (Genesis 2:16-17), but Adam chose to disobey anyway.

After Adam sinned, not only did man's nature change—from innocence to sinful depravity, but the nature of the entire Creation changed. In Genesis 3, we read that Adam would have to sweat to grow food because the soil became difficult to work, tending to bear weeds. In Romans 8:20-22, we read that the Creation was made subject to vanity. This word "vanity" means an emptiness of purpose or futility. But God, who subjected it to this vanity, did so "in hope, that the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of decay into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now." The Creation has become corrupt. It is no longer "very good" as it was when God originally made it (Genesis 1:31). Things happen that cause people to suffer.

Copyright © 2005-2016 wordofhisgrace.org

Permission is granted to reproduce this article only if reproduced in full with no alterations and keeping the copyright statement and this permission statement intact. Unless otherwise noted, Bible references are from the World English Bible (WEB).

repentanceR2p2.pdf

So, we see that some suffering comes directly from sinful man's actions—wars, acts of terrorism, murders, and thefts are obvious examples, but there are many others. And, some suffering is a result of the corruption or brokenness of the Creation. And, some is directly from God because of man's sin, such as the Flood of Noah's time. This was all caused by sin entering the world through Adam.

God Doesn't Have to Save Anyone, but in Love, He Graciously Saves Those Who Believe on His Son

God has no obligation whatsoever to save us from the physical and spiritual destruction we've brought on ourselves. But the Bible says, in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life." Yes, God has no obligation to save anyone. But He is a God of love, and He saves those who believe on His Son whom He sent to die for sinners.

Yes, perhaps you are not the worst of sinners. But that does not get you out of peril. You are still a sinner. And the Bible clearly says in Romans 6:23, "the wages of sin is death." And that death referred to is both physical and spiritual or eternal death. But the verse goes on to say, "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Yes, just as sin results in eternal death, so God can give you the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ! But how?

First, remember, Paul said that God "commands that all people everywhere should repent." What does it mean to repent? What is repentance?

Repentance is translated from the Greek word *metanoēō*. It literally means "a change of mind." We show this change of mind by doing an about face and going the other way in our lives. Repentance is a turning from sin. Biblical repentance is not just a turning from a sin here and there. It is not just remorse because of a fear of punishment. It is the result of a comparison of our loathsome, sinful nature and God's Holy, righteous nature. It is a turning from our sinfulness; the sinfulness that permeates our very nature. True repentance brings us to where we can say with Job after he was confronted by God, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). If you are truly repentant, you will know that you deserve to be punished in hell fire forever.

After Repentance, Then What?

But now what? You turn from your sinfulness. But what do you turn to? Do you turn to a better life? Do you turn to the law? Do you make resolutions? Do you just start living a life of overcoming your sinfulness? What a tragedy that so many people think this!

What is even worse is that even many ministers recommend what amounts to taking stock of your sins, setting your will against them, using a 12-step program or some form of psychology, and, perhaps with prayer and fasting and asking for God's strength, putting sin out of your life. The problem with this is that sin is not just external. You are sinful to your very core. How can you put yourself out of your life?

The best you can ever hope to do is to outwardly obey the letter of the law. But you will still be sinful inside! Even if you stop your actions, you will still desire them. And that is sin. We may, like Martin Luther, commit ourselves to a monastery. But, if we are honest as he was, we will know that God's wrath still abides on us. We cannot satisfy God's righteous demands. Love is the fulfilling of the law, and God demands perfect love. Instead of loving God, Luther realized that he hated God because he knew God's wrath was on him. And that is true of every natural man and woman.

This outward struggle with sin only makes us like the Pharisees—whitened sepulchers or tombs. Jesus said to them, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitened tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Matthew 23:27). Self efforts to overcome sin without the remedy God provided only make us hypocrites.

What is this remedy? Paul wrote of his struggle with sin, "but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord!" (Romans 7:23-25a). Jesus Christ is the remedy God has provided.

Jesus Christ Alone is the Answer

The kind of repentance God wants is not a turning from our sins to a human resolve to not sin. It is not a turning from lawlessness to keeping the law. It is not a turning from immorality to morality. No,

true repentance is a turning from sin that includes turning from human efforts to establish our own righteousness through the works of the law, because this also is sin. The kind of repentance God wants is the kind in which we turn from our sinfulness to trusting in the completed work of Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Think of a coin that has repentance on one side and faith—otherwise known as trust or belief—on the other. There is no true repentance without belief. In fact, another way of thinking of repentance is to say that it is a change of mind from sinful unbelief to belief. It is a turning from rejection and distrust of Jesus Christ to entrusting Him entirely with our salvation. When we repent, we are to make an about face from sin toward Jesus Christ who has been crucified to pay the penalty for all our wretched sinfulness. In Romans 6:6, Paul writes, "knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be in bondage to sin."

Jesus Christ Himself said, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand! Repent, and believe in the Good News" (Mark 1:15). Paul explains why we should believe the Gospel, "For I am not ashamed of the Good News of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes; for the Jew first, and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

When we are faced with our sinfulness, we must turn to believe that Jesus Christ the Righteous, the Son of God, was made flesh, lived a sinless life, took upon Him our sins, and died for them on the Cross; shedding His blood to satisfy God's wrath against us and to pay the penalty that we would otherwise have had to pay in hell for our sins. Not only that, but His righteousness is put upon us, so that, as Paul wrote, "But of him, you are in Christ Jesus, who was made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, 'He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord'" (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

Faith

Repentance and faith are inseparable. When we put our trust in Jesus Christ, we have obviously changed our mind from sinful unbelief. Or, rather, God has changed our minds. He gives us the gift that enables us to turn and trust. I have quoted Ephesians 2:8-9 many times, and will likely do so again many times because these verses are so clear: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of

yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast." The Jews, on the whole, did not seek righteousness by faith. Paul explains, "But Israel, following after a law of righteousness, didn't arrive at the law of righteousness. Why? Because they didn't seek it by faith, but as it were by works of the law. They stumbled over the stumbling stone; even as it is written, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and a rock of offense; and no one who believes in him will be disappointed'" (Romans 9:31-33). That stumbling stone and rock is, of course, Jesus Christ.

Self-righteousness and self-dependence is so deeply rooted in human nature that it is impossible to turn to Jesus Christ without God's gift of faith. Repentance is from God. When the Gentiles turned to God, the Jewish Christians who heard of it said, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life!" (Acts 11:18b). Psalm 80, verse 3, says, "Turn us again, God. Cause your face to shine, and we will be saved" (Psalms 80:3). And Jeremiah 31:18-19 says, "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, You have chastised me, and I was chastised, as a calf unaccustomed to the yoke: turn you me, and I shall be turned; for you are the LORD my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I struck on my thigh: I was ashamed, yes, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth."

Yes, God commands all men everywhere to repent. And there is no doubt that those whom He has given to Jesus Christ will do so. In Psalm 110:1-3, we read of the coronation of Jesus Christ after He had accomplished our salvation: "The LORD says to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool for your feet.' The LORD will send forth the rod of your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of your enemies. Your people offer themselves willingly in the day of your power, in holy array. Out of the womb of the morning, you have the dew of your youth." But we can come to Him only on the basis of His perfect righteousness, nothing of our own.

We turn in repentance from our sinfulness to rest faithfully and completely in Jesus Christ. Paul explains in Galatians 2:16: "Yet knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law, because no flesh will be justified by the works of the law." And in Romans 3:23-28, we read,

For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God set forth to be an atoning sacrifice, through faith in his blood, for a demonstration of his righteousness through the passing over of prior sins, in God's forbearance; to demonstrate his righteousness at this present time; that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him who has faith in Jesus. Where then is the boasting? It is excluded. By what manner of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. We maintain therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

This is justification through the redemption that Jesus Christ earned for us on the Cross, and we receive that justification by faith alone. To those who turn and exercise faith in Jesus Christ alone as Savior, God pronounces the verdict, Not guilty!

Where will you stand on the Day of Judgment? Will you be found guilty of your sins? Or will you be found repentant of your sinful nature; washed clean of all of your sins; and, with a new, sinless nature, resting in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation?