

"Fishers of Men" Series

Tools for the Job

"Repentance"

Luke 24:46-47; Acts 20:17-21

A few weeks ago, we began this series on what it means to be a "fisher of men," as Jesus called us to be. We began with an overview of what it meant to be a fisherman in Bible times (Mark 1:16-20). We then looked at the command Jesus gave to "Come ye after me" ("Follow me") from Mark 1:17. In the message, "Sir, Give Me This Water" (John 4:1-42), we found an example from this episode in His ministry "how He fished," so to speak. Our last time in this study we spent a couple weeks on "The Parable of the Sower" (Matthew 13) where we found that our primary responsibility is to sow the seed and let God use it as He sees fit.

This week, we begin looking at the content of our message and what we must actually say to the lost (the right tools for the job, so to speak). And a good place to start is with the subject of repentance.

In many churches today, repentance has become a forgotten word, and at times, an unwelcome one. Some see it is as outdated, others as unkind, but Jesus included it in His final instruction to the disciples: "*...that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations.*"

We need to be careful we don't redefine it nor ignore it. Instead, we need to understand it, preach it, and plead with sinners to turn from sin and believe the gospel, for only then can they receive the forgiveness that Christ freely offers.

What Repentance Is

Before we look at what repentance is, consider how Jesus used the word "repent" in His ministry. When you read through the Gospels carefully, you discover that Jesus almost never called people to repent of long lists of specific sins. Instead, He called them to repent regarding one thing: their relationship to Him.

Jesus proclaimed His core message: "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel*" (Mark 1:15). Notice that Jesus presented repentance and faith as a unified response to the gospel, not as two separate requirements. He wasn't saying "first repent, then believe." He was describing a single spiritual response from two different angles.

This pattern continues throughout Jesus' ministry. When He called Matthew the tax collector, He didn't give him a lecture about financial honesty. When He spoke with Zacchaeus, He didn't demand that the corrupt official clean up his business practices first. Instead, Jesus called people to follow Him, and the changes in life naturally followed that decision.

This tells us something crucial about the nature of biblical repentance. At its heart, saving repentance is not primarily about specific sins or behaviors. It's about changing your mind regarding the most important question anybody will ever face: what will you do with Jesus Christ?

- A basic understanding of biblical repentance is God's gracious gift that enables a person to change their mind about Jesus Christ, turning from rejecting Him to trusting Him as their only hope of salvation.

With that understanding in mind, let's look at each part in more detail so we can see what the Bible actually teaches about repentance.

I. IT'S A GRACIOUS GIFT – ACTS 11:18; 2 TIM. 2:25

| Acts 11:18

¹⁸ When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

2 Timothy 2:25

²⁵ In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

We are saved by grace through faith alone. Repentance is not an added work or something we produce, but the Spirit-led turning of the heart that always accompanies true faith. In other words, it's something we receive. Both repentance and faith are gifts of God, not conditions we earn, but responses He grants.

While repentance is granted by God (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25), it does not remove human responsibility (Acts 17:30). God enables repentance through His Word and Spirit, but man must still respond in humility and faith.

Acts 17:30

³⁰ And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

This truth should encourage us in our evangelism. Our job is to present Christ clearly (to sow the seed) and trust the Holy Spirit to grant the repentance that leads to faith. God does the work that only God can do.

II. IT INVOLVES CHANGING YOUR MIND ABOUT JESUS CHRIST – 1 THESS. 1:8-10

A. The Greek word for "repentance" (μετάνοια) literally means "to change one's mind" or "to think differently afterward."

1. In its application in the word "repentance" it means a change of mind that results in a

change of direction.

Illustration:

- a) Repentance can be seen as what happens when someone has been swimming away from a boat and suddenly realizes they need to be rescued and starts swimming toward their rescuer instead.
 - b) Repentance, at its root, is about changing direction, not just feeling differently, but thinking differently and therefore acting differently in response to the gospel.
2. Repentance is about changing your mind regarding who Jesus is and what you need to do to be saved.

What is the primary sin that separates every person from God? It's not lying or stealing or losing your temper, as serious as those things are. The primary sin is rejecting Jesus Christ. In John 16:9, Jesus said the Holy Spirit would convict the world *"of sin, because they believe not on me."*

John 16:8-11

⁸ And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: ⁹ Of sin, because they believe not on me; ¹⁰ Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; ¹¹ Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

Repentance that saves addresses the root sin: rejecting Christ.

- It's about changing your mind from "I don't need Jesus" to "I desperately need Jesus." From "I can save myself" to "Only Christ can

save me." From "Jesus is optional" to "Jesus is essential."

III. REPENTANCE MEANS TURNING FROM REJECTION TO TRUST – ACTS 20:21

A. This is where repentance and faith come together as part of the same gift.

You cannot genuinely turn to Christ without turning from whatever you were trusting before. And you cannot genuinely turn from rejecting Christ without placing your trust in Him instead.

B. Paul doesn't present these as two separate requirements or as a sequence where one must precede the other. Instead, he describes his unified message using two complementary terms.

This linguistic structure in this verse suggests something unique about the nature of salvation itself. Paul isn't saying "first repentance, then faith" or "faith plus repentance equals salvation." He's highlighting different aspects of the same response to God's grace.

C. The theological concept of a "unified gift"

1. The idea that faith and repentance represent different aspects of the same divine gift finds strong biblical support when we examine how Scripture presents salvation.

Paul describes this in Ephesians 2:8-9, where he calls salvation "the gift of God." This gift encompasses everything necessary for salvation, including both the ability to believe and the ability to turn from sin.

2. When we trust God for salvation, He doesn't

give faith separately from repentance. They come together as integrated components of His gracious work in our heart.

IV. BIBLICAL EXAMPLES THAT ILLUSTRATE THE DEFINITION OF REPENTANCE

A. The Ethiopian eunuch – Acts 8:26-39

1. Verses 26-28

The Ethiopian eunuch was a deeply religious man who had traveled hundreds of miles to worship in Jerusalem. He was reading the Old Testament scriptures, seeking to understand God's truth. But when Philip found him, the eunuch was confused about the identity of the Messiah (vs. 26-28).

2. Verses 29-35

Notice what happened when Philip explained the gospel to him. The eunuch didn't need to confess a list of terrible sins or demonstrate that he felt sorry enough about his moral failures. Instead, he needed to change his mind about who Jesus was and what Jesus had done for him.

Philip showed him that the suffering servant described in Isaiah 53 was actually Jesus Christ, who had died for the eunuch's sins and risen from the dead. When the eunuch understood this truth, his mind changed about what he needed to do to be saved. He stopped trusting in his religious pilgrimage and started trusting in Christ's finished work.

3. Verses 36-39

The result? Salvation, baptism and great joy.

That's what happens when someone experiences genuine biblical repentance. They don't leave feeling burdened by the weight of their sins; they leave rejoicing in the sufficiency of their Savior.

B. The Apostle Paul – Acts 9:1-20

The Apostle Paul's conversion gives us perhaps the clearest illustration of what it means to change your mind about Jesus Christ.

1. Verses 1-2

Before his Damascus-road experience, he was absolutely convinced that Jesus was a false messiah who threatened the true faith of Israel. He was so committed to this belief that he was willing to imprison and even kill those who claimed to follow Christ.

2. Verses 3-7

But when the risen Christ appeared to him personally, everything changed. He didn't need to feel sorry about being a Pharisee or regret his educational achievements or apologize for his religious zeal. He needed to change his mind about who Jesus actually was.

3. Verses 18-20

Once He understood that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah who had died and risen again, his entire philosophy shifted. He stopped rejecting Christ, and started proclaiming Him. He stopped persecuting the church and started planting churches. He stopped trusting in his own righteousness and started boasting in the cross of Christ.

Notice that the changes in his behavior flowed naturally from his change of mind about Christ. He didn't have to manufacture new behaviors to prove his repentance was genuine. When his thinking changed, his living changed as a natural result.

C. The centurion, Cornelius – Acts 10

1. Verses 1-2

Cornelius presents us with another fascinating example because he was already a devout, God-fearing man before Peter came to preach to him. He prayed regularly, gave generously to those in need, and was well-respected for his character. If anyone could have been saved by good works and religious devotion, it would have been Cornelius.

2. Verses 34-43

But notice what Peter preached to this good man. He didn't compliment Cornelius on his moral achievements or suggest that he just needed to try a little harder. Instead, Peter proclaimed Jesus Christ as the only way to receive forgiveness of sins. He explained that *"whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins"* (Acts 10:43).

Cornelius had to change his mind about how someone actually becomes right with God. He had been trusting in his own righteousness and religious efforts. Biblical repentance meant turning from that self-reliance to complete dependence on Christ's righteousness instead.

3. Verses 44-48

The Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and his

household while Peter was still preaching. This wasn't because they had worked up enough emotion or reformed enough behaviors. It was because they had received the truth about Christ and changed their thinking about how salvation actually works.

Conclusion: When Jesus called those first disciples to become fishers of men, He knew they would need the right tools to be effective. One of the most important tools He gave them was a clear understanding of what it means to repent and believe the gospel.

In this message, we've learned that biblical repentance isn't about feeling sorry enough or trying hard enough or doing enough good works to make up for your sins. It's about changing your mind regarding the most important question you'll ever face: what will you do with Jesus Christ?

When we understand repentance this way, evangelism becomes both easier and more effective. We can present Christ clearly and confidently, knowing that the same God who grants repentance also empowers our fishing efforts.