

Repent and Believe in the Good News!

Mark 1:14-20

A man was continually "rededicating" his life to the Lord. He always prayed the same prayer, "Lord, take the cobwebs out of my life. Take the cobwebs out of my life!" His pastor had heard this prayer more times than he cared to remember. He was tired of hearing it. Finally, when the man uttered the prayer one more time, his pastor responded with a prayer of his own: "Lord, don't take the cobwebs out just kill the spider!" What are those besetting sins that are always tripping you up? That you need to repent of? There are three kinds of people in the world.

First, are the proud and self-satisfied. They are impenitent. They feel no sorrow. They experience no regret. No remorse. They don't even realize the mess they are in.

Second, there are the penitent who are so crushed by their contrite self-reproach that they wallow in their self-pity. They never reach out to God. They just lay in their misery.

Thirdly, there are people like the prodigal son in Luke 15. They hate themselves for their failure, but they find in that shame the stimulation to say, "I will rise up and go to my Father."

Which of these three are you?

Jesus began his public ministry with a call to repent and believe in the Gospel. Repentance is a frequently abused word. Many people equate repentance with being sorry or with regret or remorse. But it's more than that. Regret and remorse are of the mind. They can be assuaged with time and the kindness of loved ones. But repentance is from the heart. True repentance hates sin for what it is—an affront to God. Knowing that sin is evil, and that God hates it motivates the truly repentant person to forsake it. Genuine repentance forsakes sin and turns in total commitment to Jesus Christ. True repentance is moral and ethical to the core. It is shown in a change of life.

Unfortunately, today, however, we are seeing more and more people abdicating their moral responsibility and replacing it by victimhood. Victimhood teaches people to blame someone else for their personal failures and iniquities. The Biblical teachings about human depravity, sin, guilt, repentance, and humility are not compatible with any of those ideas. In many circles today the idea of conscience has vanished. The idea of evil is passive. Sin is no longer sin. But it is.

We were created in the image and likeness of God with a Godly nature. When Adam yielded to sin, he died and lost God's image and likeness and with it his Godly nature. All of us have inherited Adam's sinful nature for as St. Paul wrote in Romans 3:23, "**all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.**" As Isaiah reminds us, "**there is none who are righteous, no not one.**" We are all born with a fallen and sinful nature. A nature that manifests itself within us as we grow.

A man came up to his Pastor and said that he could not swallow the Bible's teaching on "original sin." The Pastor replied, "there's no occasion for you to swallow it – it's already inside of you."

Sin is something we are born in. It is part of our nature, our essence, who we are. As we grow it manifests itself in our thoughts, words, and deeds. It is something we commit. Commit by what we do and commit by what we fail to do.

We see sad events transpiring today. We read of mothers smothering children and fathers shaking babies. But if one did not do this and if they said, "I didn't strike the baby, I just never fed the baby, I never changed a diaper. I never placed a warm blanket over the baby. I didn't DO anything wrong." Would you buy the argument? No! Nor will God excuse our sins of omission. We are to repent and receive the Gospel.

Christ has the power to change the way you think when you yield to Him. True repentance acknowledges God's Word concerning sin and yields to Christ to change his mind and begin a life of acceptable behavior pleasing to the Lord. Repentance is the first response to the Gospel that God demands. Nothing else can come before it and nothing else can take its place. Repent and believe in the Good News. It is said of repentance that, "It makes a person allergic to what they were once addicted and addicted to what they were once allergic." After repenting we cannot promise God that we will never sin again, but we can want it, and we can trust Him to change us. What God asks for is willingness, not ability.

A young girl accepted Christ as her Savior. She applied for membership in a local church. "Were you a sinner before you received the Lord Jesus into your life?" asked the Pastor. "Yes, sir," she replied. "Well, are you still a sinner?" "To tell you the truth, I feel I'm a greater sinner than ever," she said. He then asked, "Then what real change have you experienced?" "I don't quite know how to explain it," she said, "except I used to be a sinner running after sin, but now that I am saved, I'm a sinner running from sin!"

This change of mind cannot be attributed to us but to God. All that we can do is to accept God's view on sin. Hearing the Good News changes our minds. It helps us to understand that sin is our real problem and that we can do nothing to save ourselves apart from Christ.

When people asked John the Baptist what he meant when he told people to repent. He told them they needed to change. What does that look like? He told them to share their goods with others, feed the hungry, be honest in business and be satisfied with your wages. The key word is willingness. The key word is commitment. The key word is change. The key is becoming like Christ.

A man asked another man if he was a Christian. The man thought for a moment and then said, "Wait just a few minutes." He then sat down and wrote down a list of names on a tablet. He handed it to the man who had asked him if he was a Christian. He said, "Here is a list of people who know me best. Ask them if I am a Christian." The evidence of faith is spiritual fruit.

Repentance changes the way we think about God. As sinners we are not capable of thinking about God and His ways the right way. Only Christ can correct our way of thinking.

The Lord ordered Jonah to warn the people of Nineveh of impending judgment. He refused to go. He refused to go because his mind was made up. He was not going to do anything that would help the people of Nineveh because of their evil ways. He was not responsible for changing his mind God was. Without God he would never have changed his mind and gone to Nineveh.

Job repented, not of any past sins that might have caused his trouble, but of his mistrust of God in the midst of it. Ultimately, God never answered Job's questions. Job never actually found out why all this loss and horror had occurred. It was as if the answer to Job's queries was simply God's presence. God was saying, "If you know Who I am, then you will trust Me. That will be enough." In the final scene, Job was restored. God triumphed over the mockeries of Satan, Job's possessions were multiplied, and the story was complete.

A Pastor was putting his whole heart into his sermon. At the end of his message, he declared: "You need to repent and turn from your sin! So, buster, if you are here and your heart is not right you need to come down to this altar now!" The invitation was then. A young boy came down to the altar and looked directly at the Pastor and said, "MY NAME IS BUSTER...and I want to get my heart right!"

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Repentance accepts the Word of God and leads one to turn to and believe in Christ.

Eph. 2:8, **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."**

Christ died to give us eternal life. John 3:17-18, **"God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. For whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."**

As sinners because of the grace of God. The sacrifice of Christ gives life for **"As in Adam all die, even so in Christ all will be made alive"**. (1Co 15:22)

Salvation is only a free gift to us because Jesus Christ paid the full price for our sin. It doesn't cost us anything, but it cost God all He had. His only Son. Jesus Christ took our place. He bore the full judgment of God on sin so that we could take His place. In Christ we are forgiven. We have eternal life with God.

God wants you to believe that He loves you and the proof of this love is that He put His own Son on the cross in your place of judgment. The Good News of the grace of God has the power to change the way we think. It does this to expose sin and make us see our need for a Savior.

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Christ is the one who changes the way we think and reveals our need for a Savior to deal with sin. Christ has already dealt with sin and all we have to do is accept His offer to be our Savior. Christ can only be our Savior when we rely on Him and obey Him.

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Jonah's preaching led to a revival in Nineveh and the city was saved. Without God we can never change our minds concerning Christ. We need to hear the Word of God to change our minds and be saved just as the people of Nineveh believed God when they heard the preaching of His word and were saved. The Good News has the power to change lives and save people from destruction.

Christ took our place and paid the penalty for sin to give us a new status as God's beloved children. When Christ died on the cross one of His last words were a quotation from Psalm 22:1 "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**"

Jesus was forsaken and rejected so that we might be accepted as God's beloved children who can come to Him and call Him Father. When Christ took our sinful position, He gave us His righteous position. We received a new, holy, and perfect spirit and became a new creation. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer confirms that the spirit of the believer is holy and perfect since the Holy Spirit will not live in any other place.

Christ has given us a new status that gives us access to God's grace. The grace of God is not only God's undeserved favor but also God's empowerment to lead a new abundant life. Jesus Christ gives us a new status for life in the new heaven and new earth. He does not want anyone to perish so everyone needs to hear His words that lead to eternal life "Repent and believe the Good News."

The time of Christ's return is fast approaching, and we need to preach this message with urgency. Repentance leads to a change of mind to believe the Gospel. When Jesus calls His disciples His first words were "Follow Me". They did and their lives changed beyond their wildest imaginations. Jesus wants us to yield to Him so that He can change our way of thinking to His way of thinking to change our lives beyond our wildest imaginations.

When we repent and believe in the Good News, we receive a new spirit and are empowered to live the life of Christ. We live this life by renewing our mind and aligning our thinking with that of the Holy Spirit who now lives in our new spirit. He empowers us to walk according to the Spirit and fulfil the Scriptures that declares **"The just shall live by faith."**

Christ loved us and gave us everything He had. As we yield to Him, we become like Him. John confirms this in 1 John 4:17 when he says, **"as he is so also are we in this world."** Christ wants us to be like Him to the praise and glory of Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen!