

Repentance is Necessary

Preaching Repentance

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus with this message: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”¹ Jesus began His ministry with these words: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”²

When Jesus first sent out His disciples, we read that “they went out and preached that people should repent.”³ Twice Jesus warned His listeners “unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”⁴ And before He ascended, Jesus again said “That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations.”⁵ On the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached to the devout men explaining who Jesus was through the prophets; explaining that their lawless hands had crucified Him, but that He rose from the dead according to the Scriptures. When the men heard this they were cut to the heart and asked “what shall we do?” Peter’s response: “Repent.”⁶ Peter’s second message recorded in Acts is similar, and he again says “Repent therefore and be converted.”⁷ And over and over in the early church the disciples preached that men ought to repent.⁸ For example, Paul told the men of Athens “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.”⁹ Later Paul explains that he testified “to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁰

God has not changed. Throughout the New Testament, as in the Old, God’s Word reminds all of the necessity of repentance.¹¹ Therefore, we too must preach repentance.

Repentance and Faith

When sharing you will come across people who confess faith in Jesus, but whom you suspect have not truly repented. How can you explain to them the necessity of repentance?

First, you can remind them that Cain, Esau, Balaam, and Judas believed in the Lord, yet the Bible indicates they all perished.¹² Even the demons believe in God and tremble.¹³ However, only those who repent of their sins and place their faith in Christ will be saved. Biblical repentance and saving faith are like two sides of the same coin. Before a person

¹ Mathew 3:2

² Mark 1:15; See also Matthew 4:17

³ Mark 6:12

⁴ Luke 13:3; 13:5

⁵ Luke 24:47

⁶ Acts 2:38

⁷ Acts 3:19.

⁸ Acts 5:31; Acts 8:22; Acts 26:20; etc.

⁹ Acts 17:30

¹⁰ Acts 20:21

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 7:9-10; Hebrews 6:1; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 2:5; 2:16; 2:21-22; 3:3; 3:9; 3:19; etc.

¹² Jude 1:11; Hebrews 12:15-17; 2 Peter 2:15; Revelation 2:14; Acts 1:16-20; John 17:12

¹³ James 2:19

is saved, he is going his own way; he is doing what seems right to him. However, when the Holy Spirit convicts a person of their sins against God, the person realizes his way is leading to death.¹⁴ Saving faith necessitates turning from our way and trusting in the Lord. The word *repent* literally means to change your mind; think differently; reconsider; turn back. Therefore repentance and saving faith go hand-in-hand. Saving faith is more than just a mental acknowledgement. It involves turning from trusting in our own way and trusting in God's provision. Paul proclaimed "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ"¹⁵ Therefore, only when a man turns from his sinful ways toward God and places his trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ, is he saved.

When sharing with the lost, use the law to show that all sin is against God and then make clear that the Savior has warned "unless you repent you will...perish."¹⁶

Vertical Repentance

When King David confessed his sin to God he said "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight."¹⁷ When Pontiphar's wife tempted Joseph to lie with her, Joseph refused and said "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"¹⁸ And when the prodigal son came to his senses and returned to his father he said "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight."¹⁹

Throughout the Bible we see that all sin is first and foremost against God. Jesus explained that the first and greatest commandment is to "love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."²⁰ And the first four of the Ten Commandments have to do with our relationship with God.

When sharing, be sure to explain to your listener that all sin is ultimately against our holy Creator. Therefore, only vertical repentance saves. Explain that we are all guilty of breaking the first commandment because we have not always placed God first in our lives. We're all guilty of violating the third commandment because we have sometimes used His name lightly. Idolatry and blasphemy offend and anger God. Therefore we desperately need to seek God's forgiveness first.

Many unbelievers may have remorse for their sins committed against another, but God's Word explains that it is "Godly sorrow [that] produces repentance leading to salvation."²¹ Therefore, only vertical repentance saves.

¹⁴ Proverbs 14:12

¹⁵ Acts 20:21

¹⁶ Luke 13:3

¹⁷ Psalm 51:4

¹⁸ Genesis 39:9

¹⁹ Luke 15:21

²⁰ Mark 12:30

²¹ 2 Corinthians 7:10