

Repentance Must Precede Faith



Repentance (Part 3)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, as we continue with our theme for this week—a theme that's summed up in one powerful, scriptural word: repentance.

In my previous talks this week, I have given a simple scriptural definition of repentance. I've said that repentance has two aspects. First of all, an inner change of will, a change of our mind about the way we've been living. Secondly, an outward change of behavior turning around, stopping going our own way, doing our own thing, making a 180 degree turn, facing up to God, and saying, "God, I'm sorry for the way I've been living. I've been trying to run my own life. Now, I'm prepared to hear from you and do what you tell me." That's repentance.

I've also explained why we all need to repent. The great basic reason is stated in a single verse of Isaiah—Isaiah chapter 53 verse 6:

> "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him [that's on Jesus] the iniquity [or the rebellion] of us all."

So, that's the basic problem of the human race. It's not that we've all committed murder or adultery or theft, but there's one thing we've all done. We've all turned to our own way. And that is iniquity or rebellion. And because we've all turned to our own way, God's requirement of repentance from the human race is universal. We all must repent!

I've also explained how repentance must be expressed in certain specific actions. Universally in the New Testament, the primary expression of true repentance is to be baptized. But thereafter, there are particular actions that are appropriate for particular kinds of persons.

And in the third chapter of Luke we find examples of three kinds of people who came to John the Baptist and said, "We have repented. Tell us how to work it out in our lives." There was the man with two tunics who was required to give one tunic to the man who had none. There was the tax collector who was required to be fair and not avaricious in collecting taxes. There was the soldier who was required not to

exercise violence or intimidation and to be content with his wages.

Being content with our wages is not something that's found in many sections of contemporary society. Let me point out, there's an area where many might need to repent.

And of course, if we look at it, we can see that there are many kinds of people—even in churches for whom some specific act of repentance is often required. For instance there's the church gossip who goes around carrying tales and poisoning the very atmosphere. That person's repentance is not effective until that person sees his gossiping. Or there's the businessman who cheats on his income tax. He may be a church-goer, he may give money to charity, and so on. But his repentance is not effective until his income tax returns are honest. Or today we find so many people that are some way involved in pornography. Their minds being poisoned by filthy books and pictures. And yet they may in many ways have an outward appearance of respectability. For that kind of person, repentance demands the complete destruction of all types of pornographic material. The next time you walk past a place where that material is available, you avert your eyes, look the other way, and walk past. Without that, no kind of religious practice is of any real value to you. You've got to repent.

Today I'm going to show you how repentance is the essential first step to true faith. You see, many people are struggling for faith. They don't really know how to find true faith. They don't realize that their problem is they've got to repent first. This is absolutely consistently the universal message of the New Testament. Let's look at some examples quickly. First of all, the message of John the Baptist in Mark chapter 1, verses 1 through 4:

> "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in Isaiah the prophet: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way'—'A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him." And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

John's specific task was to prepare the way for the promised Messiah to come to God's people Israel. And notice, he had one message—repent! Repentance prepares the way for God to come into our lives. Many times God cannot come into our lives until we fulfill the requirement of repentance. Then let's look at the first preaching of Jesus, which is also recorded a little further on in Mark chapter 1, verses 14 and 15:

> "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God [the Gospel]. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'"

Notice, those are the first requirements that Jesus ever gave in public preaching. "Repent—believe the good news of the Gospel." Don't try to believe until you have first repented. After his resurrection, talking to his apostles, Jesus reaffirmed this order. It says in Luke chapter 24 verses 45 through 47:

> "Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, 'This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.'"

Notice again the order—repentance and forgiveness of sins. Before forgiveness of sins comes repentance. Without repentance, there can be no forgiveness of sin.

Let's look also at the first message of the Church on the day of Pentecost. Peter, a spokesman both of God and of the Church, said this in Acts 2:37–38:

> "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

Notice the first requirement—repent and be baptized. There is no other step, no other act, no other ritual, that will ever take the place of true repentance. That has to come first. And then listen for a moment to the message of Paul. In Acts chapter 17 verses 30 through 31, he's preaching to the men of Athens about their idolatry, and their superstition. And this is what he says:

> "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to

> all men by raising him from the dead."

Notice, God's command. He commands all people everywhere to repent. "All people everywhere" leaves room for no exceptions. It applies to you, it applies to me, it applies to every human soul. The first thing we have to do, in order to get into a right relationship with God, is to repent. And then Paul, later in Acts 20 describes the message that he carried to the world of his day. Acts 20 verse 21:

> "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

Notice the first step before having faith is turning to God in repentance. The word "turn" indicates the nature of repentance—the inward decision followed by the outward change of life. That is an essential preliminary to true faith. Let me make a personal application of this universal principle to you. The principle is that without repentance you cannot ever experience true faith. Always, the first requirement is repent, then believe. This runs consistently throughout the entire New Testament from beginning to end. There is no more principle, more consistently established in the New Testament than that to achieve true faith you must go by way of repentance. You must experience that inner change of mind followed by willingness to change your whole way of life.

Are you perhaps today struggling for faith? Are you trying to believe. I've counseled literally hundreds of people with various kinds of spiritual problems, marital problems, personal problems, emotional problems. And let me just sum up my conclusion very briefly. My conclusion is that probably 50 percent of these problems have as their root cause the failure of those people to repent. They're trying to believe, they're trying to lead a Christian life, they're trying to get results from God, they're praying, going to church, reading their Bible, and yet the results don't follow. Why? One simple clear reason, they've never repented. You see, you have to remember that faith is a gift from God. You can't get faith unless God gives you faith. This is clearly stated by Paul in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8:

> "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—"

So faith is a gift from God. God can give it or God can withhold it. And according to the clear principals of the New Testament, you do not qualify to receive from God the gift of faith, which you need, which you must have if you're to be a real Christian. But you don't qualify to receive that gift unless you've repented. So let me suggest to those of you who are struggling for faith, struggling with emotional, personal, marital problems—check on your repentance. Have you ever really repented? Have you ever really come to the end of your own way, doing your own thing, setting your own standards, recognized that your way is not God's way, stopped, turned around, faced up to God, and said, "God I'm sorry for the way I've been living. Just tell me what you want me to do and I'll do it." I'll tell you one thing, a person who has truly repented doesn't have a struggle with God. He just waits to hear and to obey.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be speaking about the people who say, "I don't need to repent."

Radio Program

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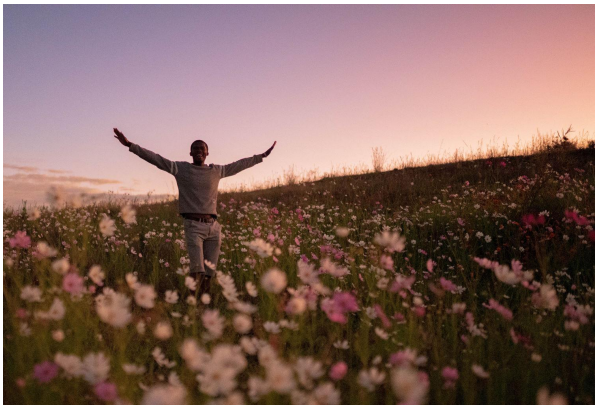

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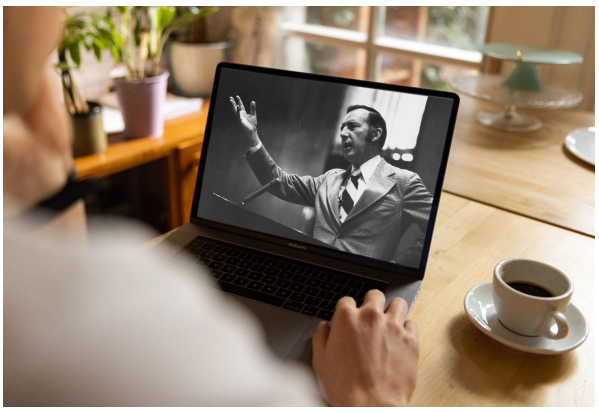

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