

Four Decisive Steps



Atonement
By Derek Prince

We're going to continue now with the steps that we need to take to appropriate what God has already provided for us through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. In the previous sessions I gave you the example of Joshua and the children of Israel. In Joshua 1:2, God said, "I am giving them the land." In verse 3 He said, "I have given them the land." From then on, legally the land belonged to them but they didn't occupy it. Their task was to make the legal experiential. What was legally theirs had to become theirs in experience.

I believe exactly the same is true for us in respect of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Jesus has done it all, it's perfect, it's complete, it's all inclusive. God has given it to us. But we have to move from the legal to the experiential. It has to become real in our experience. I think if you understand that you'll possibly avoid feeling condemned when you look at what's available and maybe realize that you don't possess it. That's all right, that's part of the process. It's not something out of order. So we are discussing how to make the legal experiential.

In the previous session I suggested that the one word salvation is the Biblical word to describe all that has been provided for us by the sacrifice of Jesus. So we're talking about how to enter into salvation. In these closing few sessions I'm going to deal with that. But you need to lay hold of the fact that I'm talking about salvation. Not just having your sins forgiven but appropriating all that Jesus has made available to us.

There are, I believe, four decisive steps and I'm going to put them up on the board and then we're going to consider what's implied by each of them. Number one, repent. Number two, believe. Number three, confess. Number four, act. They're very simple. As I said before, if we miss it it's not because it's too difficult but because it's too simple. God has made it so simple that a little child can do it all. As a matter of fact, Jesus said unless you become like a little child, you won't qualify to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Let's talk now about repentance. We'll turn to Mark 1:15, these are the words of Jesus Himself:

> "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent and believe in the gospel."

What's the first thing we have to do? Repent. See, a great deal of teaching today almost completely omits repentance. I'd like you to look just in Matthew 4:17, also.

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> "From that time, Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

I think repentance today is a neglected teaching. I was in Southeast Asia a couple of years ago in a big meeting of which I was not the preacher. There was an American preacher who gave a very good teaching on how to be healed, that was the essence of it, through the Word of God. I was familiar with all the scriptures he quoted and the message really blessed me. I'm not criticizing the message. But, most of the people there were from a Chinese background and I think very few of them were familiar with the Bible. And having described how wonderful all this was, the preacher said, "Now, if you want this, come forward and pray." Well, scores and scores of people came forward but the word repentance was not used once.

Then Ruth and I found ourselves trying to minister to some of the people that had come forward. Well, they were from a background of ancestor worship and all sorts of occult practices and idolatry. They wanted to get Jesus on top of all that. Well, Jesus doesn't agree to that. The result, I would have to say, was confusion.

Now, he was a good preacher and I think an ethical man. I don't suppose he went back to the States and said 250 people got saved. Because I think very few people got saved, if any, because they hadn't met the first requirement which was repentance. Turn from your wicked ways, turn from the occult, give up your ancestor worship and all the things you've lived with for generations, and make a clean break and come to Jesus. I don't pick on that preacher at all because I admire him, I mean, he's a good teacher. But it was just a clear example of the failure to lay down the first condition.

I think you could go to a good many churches and meetings of various kinds, and people would make, quote, invitations and say, "Here's a wonderful experience. If you want to be free of all your problems, just come and receive Jesus." How many of you know that receiving Jesus doesn't resolve all your problems? In fact, as somebody said, it increases them!

A friend of mine who is well known to all of you was asked, "What's the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit?" He said, "Trouble." That's a simplistic presentation of the gospel.

So, the first requirement is repentance. Repentance is not an emotion, it is a decision. It is deliberately turning your back on the past, turning around 180 degrees, facing up to the Lord and saying, "Lord, here I am. Tell me what to do and I'll do it." That's repentance. That's what's required to start.

I want to point out to you very quickly that the whole New Testament always puts repenting before believing. There is no such thing in the New Testament as believing without repenting. Let's look very quickly for a moment in Luke 24:46–47. Now, the resurrected Christ is explaining to His disciples the necessity of His death. In verse 46:

> "He said to them, 'It is written in the scriptures, and thus it was necessary for the Christ, the Messiah, to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission [or forgiveness] of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.'"

What is the message? What is it? In the name of Jesus it's repentance and forgiveness of sins—not just forgiveness of sins.

And then on the day of Pentecost, after the Holy Spirit had fallen, the great many of the crowd present were convicted of their sins. So they cried out in real distress to the apostles in Acts 2:37:

> "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

What have we got to do about it? And Peter stood up, and he was the spokesman of the church and the spokesman of God, and he laid down a requirement which has never changed.

> "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

So actually there there are three specific requirements: repent, be baptized, receive the Holy Spirit. In my opinion, that's still the same today. God has never changed. And they're not three stages that are supposed to happen in intervals of six months, they're all supposed to happen together. They didn't wait for a baptismal service, they didn't put their name down on the church register to be baptized next time there was a service. They got baptized the same day. Now you think about three thousand people

being baptized. I mean, if you take even two minute, that's 6,000 minutes. I'm not going to do the mathematics because it's not my strong point. But you take, let's say, the twelve apostles did the baptizing. Divide twelve into 6,000 and you get what, 500, don't you? 500 minutes is what? Nearly ten hours! Say eight hours. You see, that made an impact on Jerusalem which people never forgot.

It's very interesting that they have excavated now at the south end of the temple where the people went in, a whole series of what they call in Jewish ?mick vay?; that is, places where people do ceremonial washing. It's still a part of Judaism. So people say where was the water, how did they get baptized? There was plenty of places for the people to get baptized.

But I'm just pointing out to you that the first requirement was repent. You've rejected your Messiah, you're responsible for His crucifixion, you've got to repent, you've got to turn around, say, "God, we've done the wrong thing. Now we're willing to do the right thing." That's repentance.

And then in Acts 20, Paul is describing his ministry in Ephesus. He says in verses 20–21:

> "How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance towards God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

So Paul there outlines very simply the message he preached to everybody—Jews or Greeks, in public or in people's homes—repentance and faith toward God.

Then if you want to, we won't look into the book of Revelation, but in Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus gives messages to seven churches. And to five of those churches His first requirement was repent. If you want the churches, they were Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea. There were only two churches that were exempted from the requirement to repent. Repent means you are a rebel. You remember we've seen that all the way through. Now you lay down your rebellion.

At the end of World War II the Allies had won demand of the Axis forces, which was unconditional surrender. They said we will not make peace on any other basis. God lays down the same terms. He will not make peace with the sinner on any other basis but unconditional surrender. No arguments, no demands, no excuses, no reservations. "Here I am, God. Tell me what to do." And when you've done that, then you submit yourself and commit yourself to the Lordship of Jesus. That's repentance. It's the first requirement, it's an unvarying requirement.

In the years when I did a lot of personal counseling—which I don't do very much today—I counseled people with all the typical problems. I eventually came to this conclusion that the basic problem of most of them was they had never really repented. I concluded that if we could teach and obtain repentance, 50% of the problems that we deal with in counseling wouldn't be there. And I'm convinced it's still the same.

When I've described repentance, I think you'll see. It removes a whole lot of obstacles. I don't say there are no problems left, but I would say it's the root cause of 50% of problems, it's the lack of true repentance.

After repent we have believe and confess. Now, I was in two minds as to what order to put those in. Do I put confess and believe or do I put believe and confess. In the end, I put them together. It's very significant how close believing and confessing go together.

I'd like to turn now to Romans 10:8–10, which is, as I understand it, the basic New Testament teaching on how to enter into salvation. I want to suggest to you that it applies to every provision that God made through the death of Jesus. Not just the forgiveness of sins but the healing of your body, the sanctifying of your soul, the provision of your material needs, right relationships in the church; they are all obtained on the basis of the sacrifice of Jesus. So, salvation is the all inclusive word and the principle stated by Paul here apply in every instance, as I understand it. So this is an extremely important passage. Let's read verses 8–10:

> "What does it say? [We won't go back to that.] The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach; that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus [I prefer to say Jesus as Lord] and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made to salvation."

Notice that it begins with the word. What does it say? The word, the basis of all that we do is the word of God. Without

the word, you have nothing to act on. The word is near you.

And then I want you to notice an interesting thing. In the three verses, each one deals with the mouth and the heart. I would say, in a way, you cannot be saved apart from the right use of your mouth and your heart. But the interesting thing is that the first two times it's the mouth first and then the heart. The third time it's the heart first and then the mouth. Which, as I understand it, is the key to acquiring faith. It's the right use of your mouth and the right response of your heart.

It's rather interesting because we have in English the phrase "to learn by heart." All of us know what that means. Which means we memorize something by saying it again and again. Have you noticed that? That's how you learn by heart. Interestingly, in Hebrew they say "to learn by the mouth." Which is typical of the Jews because they come to the down to earth, practical thing; what you have to do is say it again and again with your mouth. How does it get to your heart? Through your mouth. Look now and we'll see, verse 8:

> "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart .."

Where does it start? In your mouth. How does it get to your heart? From your mouth, that's right. Verse 9:

> "...that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Which do you do first there? Confess with your mouth, believe in your heart. Most of us wouldn't put it in that order. I'm not making an absolute out of this, I'm just pointing out that in Paul's description, the mouth plays a much more important and primary part than it would in what most of us would use if we were trying to describe salvation.

Then in the 10th verse it's reversed.

> "For with the heart one believes to righteousness, with the mouth confession is made to salvation."

Now let me try and explain what confession is. Confession is from a Latin verb, ?confidio?, and it means literally "to say the same as" or "to say something with another." So, confession in its essence is saying the same as. Now you've got to put in the rest. A lot of people, especially people from a Catholic background, think of confession merely as confessing sins. Well, the Bible says we've all sinned so when we say, "I have sinned," we are making our confession agree with the word of God. That is confession. Saying the same thing with your mouth as God has said in His word.

But, thank God, confession doesn't just stop at confessing your sins. If it does, it's very questionable whether you've experienced salvation. It's true but it's not the whole truth. So, for us, confession is making the words of my mouth agree with the word of God in every respect. Whatever area of salvation I want to come into, I find out what God has said in His word and I say it with my mouth about myself. I make the words of my mouth agree with the word of God in respect of whatever particular need or situation I have. So of course, being a sinner I say, "I have sinned." That's confession. But it's not the end of confession. In fact, it's only the beginning. Then I say, "Christ died for our sins." Then I say, "Christ died for my sins." And then it says, "that we might be forgiven." So I say that, "That I might be forgiven." As I go through, I personalize everything that's in the word of God in a general sense and apply it to me personally.

Now, I may not really feel forgiven. I'm sure some of you when you first came to the Lord you just said a prayer and really in a way you hoped. But, here you are today and probably one reason is because somebody taught you to keep saying "I have been forgiven. God has forgiven me all my sins." I find in dealing with people it's very important to make them go on saying that. God has forgiven all my sins. I've been saved 48 years but it still excites me when I say God has forgiven all my sins. It's not dull, it's important. I hope I'm communicating this. Confession is saying the same with your mouth about yourself as God in His word has said about you as a believer in Jesus Christ. I think that's more complete.

So, we take some examples. I mean, the examples potentially are limitless. I've just chosen a few of the more obvious and the more common. You are in need of healing. That doesn't apply to anybody here, I'm sure. But anyhow, it says in Matthew 8:16– 17:

> "They brought the sick to Jesus, and he healed them all, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet,

> saying, 'He himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses.'"

How do I confess that? How do I personalize it? I say, "Jesus Himself took my infirmities and bore my sicknesses."

I'm probably not going to spend much time saying that unless I'm sick, which is unwise, because it's very important to say it when you're not sick. It's a good way to prevent becoming sick. But suppose I'm sick, suppose I have a pain in my back or something. I believe this is the word of God. No question, the Bible is the word of God. So I say, "Jesus Himself took my infirmities and bore my sicknesses." It doesn't follow the pain in my back leaves immediately. But, because it's the word of God, it's true. So I keep on saying it. I don't stop, I hold fast my confession. We'll see that in a few moments in our next session.

But let's look at some of the others. 1 Peter 2:24. I could quote all these by heart because I've said them so many times. But 1 Peter 2:24, a wonderful scripture speaking about Jesus, it says:

> "Who [that is, Jesus] himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins might live for righteousness, by whose stripes [or wounds] you were healed."

So how do I personalize that? I say, "Jesus Himself bore my sins in his own body on the tree, that I, having died to sins might live for righteousness, by whose wounds I was healed." I don't say I am healed, I don't say I will be healed, I say I was healed. Why? Because as far as God is concerned, it's done. When Jesus said, "It is finished," it was finished.

Interestingly enough, you'll find the New Testament with relationship to the atonement, healing is never put in the future. Isaiah 53:5 says "by his wounds we are healed" 700 years before it happened. And Peter says "by whose wounds you were healed." You understand? We're dealing with eternal, unchanging truth. Our need is to transfer this truth from the abstract, from the word of God in the general to our lives in particular.

You may not believe it or feel it much, but I promise you if you base it on the word of God and keep on saying it, it will become real.

We've got time for just one more, 2 Corinthians 5:21:

> "God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him."

So I say, "God made Jesus who knew no sin to be sin for me, that I might become the righteousness of God in Him. Thank you, Lord, I have become the righteousness of God in Jesus." That's my confession.

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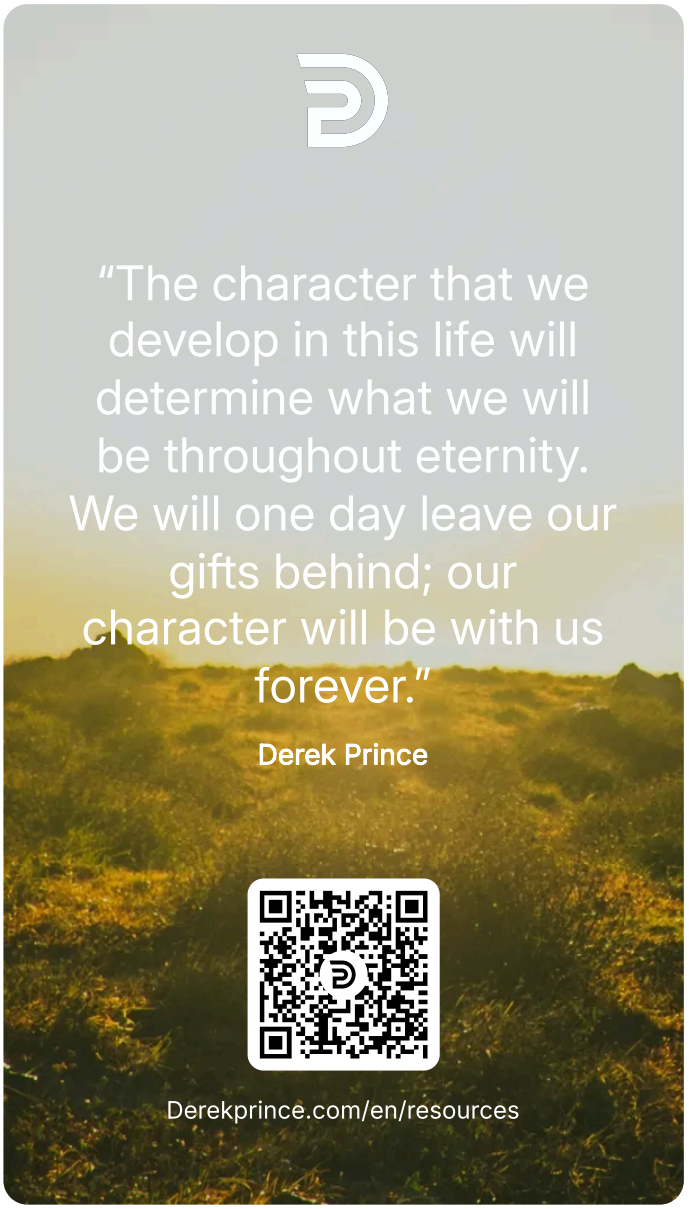
Sermon

Transcript: MV-4283-101-ENG
Last Updated: 16 Sept 2026
Website: Derekprince.com/en/resources



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