

Essentials of True Repentance, part 4

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[0 : 00] Well, it's good to be with you guys here tonight and appreciate you coming out.

! As you know, we've been working our way through the characteristics of genuine repentance! And tonight, we're going to tackle the remaining three characteristics. Turning to God in obedient submission, practical obedience, and continuing and deepening work of repentance. And the first characteristic that we'll look at this evening is turning to God in obedient submission. And when I was writing this, stuff was just rolling around my head and I thought, and I wrote this down, it is very difficult for the chief to teach this lesson. And I'm not referring to myself as the chief of police, I'm speaking to myself as the chief of sinners among you. And here the chief of sinners is being called upon to talk about these great topics of obedience. And this is the cause for my hesitation and consternation tonight. The Bible makes it very clear that we are to forsake sin. We're to forsake it. For some of us that is a lot easier said than done. But it does lead to a question, why are we to forsake sin? Well, the first thing we can say about that is, because God commands us to do so. And that would be enough in itself, right? I mean, we don't need any other reason. But when Christians forsake sin, we are then better equipped to turn to God. Let us put in a word namely that I want to plug in here, the word morality. As Christians, we are commanded to practice morality. But let me say, there are many cultures and many religions today that have a certain moral foundation. So what makes our quest for morality different from the world? We're to live moral lives, for the sake of God, for the sake of His glory, and to His delight. If we strive to live morally, but do not do so because of our love for God, and for the promotion of His glory, we run the risk of doing it for ourselves, or doing it, it can almost become idolatrous. It's like, look what I've done. And that, of course, is sin. Some people believe they're living moral lives and are not bashful when it comes to bragging about it. You know, I'm going to throw this in. I had a meeting this morning one-on-one with Dr. Piper from Oklahoma Wesleyan, a great man. And he had just finished a study that has gone around.

Back about mid-1960s, they did a survey in Christian colleges, and they asked people's views of homosexuality.

[3 : 52] They didn't even include transvestites. That was kind of an unknown. And it was something like 3% said they didn't have a problem with the homosexual lifestyle if people wanted to live that way.

They just did a survey in evangelical Christian schools. And Dr. Piper specifically mentioned Wesleyan colleges and universities.

48% of the students said they had no problem with people that wanted to be homosexuals or transvestites. They had no problem with that whatsoever. That's how far we've come. And let me tell you, that's got great impact for the church.

And particularly you young guys in here, you know, like Mike and, you know, Jerry and Oscar and I, we're on the way out, but Dan's going to have, you know, young people, if the Lord tarries, all you guys, young guys, it's major.

Dr. Piper was talking about the impact on youth groups. I said, we don't really have a youth group. Our youth group is like these gentlemen back here. They're going to be the next generation where we're going to get them involved and bring them up and hopefully add to it.

[5 : 12] We are to practice biblical morality, but as a natural outgrowth of our intimate and passionate relationship to God.

This is what Jesus had to say in John 17, verse 3, and you'll recognize that as out of the great high priestly prayer.

And this is eternal life, that we may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

And that's the Lord speaking to the Father, the inner Trinitarian conversation. The word no used in this particular verse goes far beyond that which is merely intellectual.

This is speaking of a deeper knowledge, a knowledge that is relational and a knowledge that is intimate. We are to pursue an intimate knowledge of God.

[6 : 21] And when we do, there will be results. Three come to mind, and I'm sure there are more. Intimate knowledge of God leads to a greater estimation of His worth.

Intimate knowledge of God leads to a greater satisfaction and joy in His person.

And then intimate knowledge of God leads to a greater giving of oneself for His glory. I think it was Tom Nettles who wrote the book, *By His Grace and For His Glory*.

And there were some great guys like Tozer and Jerry Bridges and others that wrote books called, *You know, In Pursuit of the Holy* or *In Pursuit of God, Getting to Know God*.

The very first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism is this, *What is the chief end of man?* And the answer is, *man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.*

[7 : 34] I remember one of the great evangelicals, and I always forget his name, Chicago shoe salesman. Moody? Moody. Well, he founded the Moody Institute.

It was who? D.L. Moody. D.L. Moody. And he was in Scotland. And there's a class of boys sitting there. And so he said, I thought, well, I'm going to ask him a question and then I'll give him the answer, you know.

He said, *what's the chief end of man?* Every hand shot up. So finally he called on one and he said, *the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.*

And he didn't realize they had memorized the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Memorized it. And he said to them, *young men, thank God tonight in your prayers that you were born in Scotland.*

Now you can go to Scotland today and ask that question and the pastor won't know that answer. I mean, it's gone. It's dark. So let me sum it up this way.

[8 : 42] We are to turn from sin. And we know that. But that turning is still incomplete. We must turn to God as the chief end of all that we desire.

Let me read to you a passage from Isaiah chapter 55. This is verse 6 and 7. That's a great verse out of Isaiah.

Isaiah the fifth gospel, by the way. And I'm doing a book study right now of Isaiah 53. And actually part of 52 and 53. John MacArthur just wrote a book called *The Gospel According to God*.

Now he's got one, a gospel according to Jesus, a gospel according to the apostles, a gospel according to Paul. Now he's written one, a gospel according to God. And it's an exposition on Isaiah 53. I can't hardly put it down.

While this verse talks about renunciation of sin, and we are to renounce sin, the emphasis is on returning.

[10 : 10] Don't leave that part out. Don't let that escape your attention. The emphasis, yeah, it talks about renounce sin, but in order so that you can return to the Lord.

That's the emphasis. And that's the lesson of those verses. Renunciation is actually only a first step that we take in returning.

We turn away from sin, and we turn to God. And that's the whole meaning of repentance. That's our subject. Repentance is doing an about-face.

You're going this direction, you're doing an about-face, you go that direction. That's what repentance is. We turn away from sin, and we turn to God.

Now why is this vital? Because sin and God are mutually exclusive. They can't dwell together.

[11 : 12] You can do one, or you can do the other, but you can't do both. And probably everybody in there has tried to do both at some point in their walk, and it's painful, doesn't it?

It's like straddling. You know, I'm 5'9", and it's straddling a 6'0 fence, guys. You know, that hurts. That hurts. You cannot follow God and sin.

I follow that passage in the Old Testament. Choose you this day whom you shall serve. And we either serve Baal or God, but we do not serve Baal and God.

It would be impossible. You just cannot do that. And the Lord has made it very clear. He'll have no other gods before Him anyway. He's not going to allow that.

There is a companion verse to the Isaiah passage in 1 Thessalonians 1, verses 9 and 10. Now listen to these words.

[12:20] How you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Powerful verse. I mean, do any of you guys have idols in your home? Maybe television? I'm meddling now. Here again we see that a person's turning from sin takes second place to the goal of turning to God.

We turn from sin to turn to God. And the evidence offered by the church in Thessalonica is that they had turned from their former life of idolatry, but were then able to achieve the greater goal of turning to God.

And Paul, of course, commends them. And only then were they able to obediently serve Him.

Because Paul, of all the apostles, understood you can't serve both. It can't be done.

So as is true in all genuine repentance, there was a turning away and there was a turning to. They had a passionate desire and even a longing to serve God, but this was made possible because there was a rejection and a renunciation of their former life in sin.

[13:59] Thank goodness the Holy Spirit revealed to them that this was an essential to turning to God. They had to reject their former life, renounce sin.

Only then were they equipped to turn to God. Repentance also involves practical obedience. And that's the next characteristic.

Again, difficult for the chief of sinners. Simple obedience, and that's the obedience that flows from the heart, is the most obvious and greatest proof that true repentance has occurred.

You know, you've repented if you're obeying. If you're obeying the commands. People can talk all day about their passion for God.

People can talk all day what they've done for God. And people do that often, you know. And people can even display a degree of piety and go around.

[15:06] I guess I could do like the Pharisees and put makeup on their faces and look drawn and all that. But what are they doing with the commands of God?

What do we do? You know, ask yourself, what are you doing with His commands? And I've never done this. I've always kind of threatened it. But that we pass out sheets of paper and something to write with and just start out and say, list 25 New Testament commands.

And this is a closed book test. And if you can't do 25, do 20. And if you can't do 20, you know, we'll get down to 3. But the New Testament is filled with commands.

Paul's writings alone. And actually, I think Philippians is the one I like to turn to because one of the chapters, I believe it's Philippians, had like 32 commands in 31 verses.

They're everywhere. And Jesus said they're not burdensome. So people can talk all they want about their passion for God, but what are they doing in terms of obedience to the commands that God has given every believer to live by?

[16:18] Does our life conform to the commands of Scripture? Now, John the Baptist had a solution for all this.

He said this, Don't tell me that you've repented. He said, show me that you've repented.

Now, that's not King James. That was my translation. But that's what John the Baptist said. He said, show me your repentance. He counseled that we must bear fruit that was worthy of repentance.

And you can read about that in Matthew 3.8. Show me. Give me living proof that you've repented.

And now let me go from teaching to meddling again.

A fruitless life, fruitless, no fruit, is counterfeit Christianity. Some seminaries try to teach that it's Christianity light.

[17:22] It's all the sugar's out. And it's L-I-T-E, Christianity light, but it's still Christian. It's not.

A fruitless life, the life that bears no fruit, is counterfeit Christianity. I love what MacArthur said on this. And he was actually expositing John 15, where we have the abiding branches and all that.

And he said, every true believer produces fruit. You sometimes have to take out a magnifying glass to find it.

But it's there. And he said, every true believer also produces plastic fruit. That's not true fruit. And it's going to be burned up with the wood, hay, and the stubble.

It says wood, hay, stubble, and plastic. And it's going to be consumed. But he said, we also have people that are in the church that are fruitless.

[18 : 36] Nothing to show for their faith in the Lord. Nothing. And according to John 15 and other passages, the Lord has already put his axe at the base of those trees.

He's ready to chop them down. And they end up in the eternal fire. They end up in eternal fire. James told us, faith without works is dead.

And that means it's useless. It has no use whatsoever to the Lord because it's a dead faith. Now, counter to all this is the person whose heart has turned to God.

He has the desire to please Him. The desire to serve Him. The desire to live a life of practical obedience.

Repentance involves the mind. It involves the emotions. But ultimately, repentance is proven true or false by a person's willful submission to the commands of God.

[19 : 52] And by the way, let me say that presupposes we know what they are. And that means we have to be in the Word. Because that's where we read about them. Now, John the Baptist, he came a few years before John MacArthur, did not have a corner on the market on the message of repentance.

Consider these verses. This first one is from the Lord Jesus Himself in Matthew 7, verses 19 to 21. You've all got it memorized. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire.

Thus, you will recognize them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Amazing section of Scripture. And that's the closing out the Sermon on the Mount when you get to that point. They're closing out the Sermon on the Mount.

And if you look closely at it, what the Lord is talking about there is obedience to His Word. Living an obedient life.

[21 : 14] Well, listen to these words in Acts 26. Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.

So again, they added to what John the Baptist had already preached. Now, I'm sure no one in here is like me, but when I study all this, I get real disappointed because I know my failures. I know my failures. I know my sins. I know my inability to properly repent based upon an understanding of repentance. And I'm more disappointed in myself than anyone else is disappointed in me.

And sometimes when dying, I'll pray and I'll say, I'll close up and say, Lord, please forgive me for my sins and where I failed you. And of course, then it's, what sins?

Give me a description. Of course, then I... Now, Miss Daisy, if you ever watched Driving Miss Daisy. Now Miss Daisy, that's between me and Mr. Worthen. That's between me and the Lord.

[22 : 40] But it's easy to be disappointed ourselves. But let's remember something about repentance, guys. And if you don't get anything else, get this, okay?

When you boil it all down, repentance is ultimately a grace gift of God. He graces us with repentance.

He bestows that upon His children through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Absent the Holy Spirit, we're not going to repent. We're not going to... We're not even going to come to the Lord.

We're not going to understand. We're not going to seek Him. Romans chapter 3, starting verse 10 to about verse 18. Put those on your refrigerator. It is a grace gift of God.

He gives it to His children by the presence of the Holy Spirit. And that whole process is... The process known as being recreated in the image of Christ.

[23 : 41] That's what it's all about. Once we have truly repented, we are to live transformed lives. We're to bear fruit. In fact, Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount that we would be known for our fruit bearing.

We're going to be known by that. And you know, yesterday we had our... launched our newest missions programs. And look at all the opportunities this church is going to have for that.

Now, none of this implies sinless perfection. That was a dream of Wesley who failed and admitted on his deathbed he had failed. We will have the blemish of disobedience throughout our Christian walk as we battle the world, the devil, and especially our unredeemed flesh.

You know, I'm not one of these guys that blames the devil and the world. I blame unredeemed flesh. But as believers in Christ, we are inclined toward God's commands and our lives are marked by practical obedience.

Obedience is not to perfection in this life, but it is our direction. It is our direction. And then, a continuing and deepening work of repentance.

[25 : 04] And this is the final characteristic. Of genuine repentance. And it is also, let me say, the ultimate test for repentance.

Truly having repentance. This is the ultimate characteristic. Is your repentance continuing? And is it growing? God begins a work of repentance in each of His children and God will complete it. And He does that through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. And since we are on a road to perfecting our faith through repentance, we will see it mature and deepened along the way. I'm going to call that the road or the highway of sanctification. We're going to get to that about November. This year. November. But it's, we're on a road.

[26 : 16] And is our repentance continuing and growing? Because it is a work of God. And He does this through the Spirit of God. Since we are on a road to perfecting our faith through repentance, we will and we should see it mature and deepen along the way.

When Jesus gives commands to repent and believe, He does so in the present tense. What does that mean for us?

It means it is a continuing command which is given to us. It does not end until we see Him face to face.

In this life, it is a continuing process. The appropriate command is that we are to live a life of repentance and faith in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, get this down in your heads. The greatest evidence that you, and let me back up. Remember, the only way you can be saved is repent and believe.

[27 : 26] Repent and have faith. Jesus said that. The Apostle said that. The Word of God says that in the Old Testament. You must repent and believe. The greatest evidence that your repentance was genuine is that you're still doing it.

It doesn't matter how long you've been a believer. You're still doing it. Repentance is not a one-time work and then we move on. Let's go to something greater.

It doesn't work like that. In my life, I don't think there's a day that goes by that does not cry out for my need to repent and confess specific sins.

Repentance marks our life. In some parts of the world, followers of Christ were actually referred to as, oh, that's that group of repenters because they were always repenting.

Luther was the greatest on that. When he was in the monastery, he'd go and he would repent and sometimes he would confess, repent, confess for six hours, eight hours.

[28 : 40] One time it was recorded he repented for 15 hours and when he got back to his little room he remembered a sin he hadn't confessed he wanted to start over. They accused him of being a malingler.

Is that how you pronounce that? That he was trying to get out of work but it just tore him up. We need to remember that genuine repentance is not a flu shot that we take once and now we've got our protection.

As we go on in the Christian life our repentance increases and it deepens. We become more acutely aware of sin therefore more acutely aware of our need for repentance.

The truth is the more we see of God and ourselves the more we see of our failures and our need for repentance. The great Charles Spurgeon understood this. He once said that he was and trapped is not my right word there.

He was in this cycle. It wasn't necessarily bad. It was good. But it was a cycle. And he said the closer I grow to Jesus and his walk and the closer I walk with him he gives me more light.

[29 : 54] That makes sense, right? And as this light this is Spurgeon as this life floods in I then come face to face with more cracks and more crevices in my life which are the result of sin.

And I have to deal with those. How do I deal with those? Repent? Confess those? And guess what happens when he would do that? More light.

And guess what happened then? More crevices. More cracks. And it was this continual process. He confessed which brought him closer to the Lord causing additional light to come in causing him to confess and repent even more.

He endured this throughout his life and it didn't end until he stood before Jesus. And from what I know about Spurgeon probably knelt before Jesus.

They asked Dr. Graham five or six years ago what was the first thing he was going to do in heaven. He said get on my face toward Jesus and ask him to forgive me for all my sins. I'm thinking boy Billy if you got him I got him.

[31 : 13] That should be true in our own life. The closer we walk with the Lord the more we see his holiness on display the more we need to repent of our own unholiness the more light we receive the more glory of holiness we see the more we need to repent.

repent. It goes it's like a circle. Now we've covered the major characteristics of repentance and they are a change of mind a sorrow for sin a personal acknowledgement and confession of sin turning away from sin renunciation of self-righteousness or good works as a means of salvation turning to God practical obedience and a continuing and deepening work of repentance.

Now those constitute our call to repentance but remember guys we're talking about a two-sided coin we've just covered side one there's another side because not only do you repent but you have to believe repent and believe believe have faith same Greek word pistou you must repent and you must believe so next time we will begin a study of our call that God has given us to have faith or to believe you