

WHAT IS REAL REPENTANCE?

What does it mean to "repent"? Is it "accepting Christ"? Is real repentance merely an emotional feeling? And is repentance really necessary for salvation? The answers to these crucial questions are found in your Bible.

BEGINNING with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, every human being has walked contrary to God's way of life. We have all contributed our share to the sins of this world (Romans 5:12).

We have all performed the "works of the flesh" – fulfilling the inordinate desires and lusts of our minds and bodies – because we have all walked according to the course of this world as set by "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2-3).

Since all of humanity has sinned, all have therefore earned the penalty of sin, which is eternal death – cessation of life forever! As Paul put it: "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death ... For the wages of sin is [eternal] death ... (Romans 6:21, 23).

All human beings who have not repented of their sins are, so to speak, on spiritual "death row" – awaiting execution of a justly deserved ultimate capital punishment. This eternal penalty was earned by simply "doing what comes naturally" – sinning!

Divine Pardon

But God, in His vast mercy, has provided a way by which we may avoid paying that extreme penalty: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

A loving God wishes that all would claim the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, for the remission of their personal sins. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Romans 5:8-10).

There is only this one way to be covered by Christ's sacrifice – only one way to enter into eternity as a glorified member of the God Family. And it involves repentance!

Acts 2:38 summarizes the whole salvation process in just one verse. And one of the very first words of that famous passage is "Repent"!

So repentance is the first vital step to salvation. Jesus declared: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5).

But what is real repentance in God's sight – as revealed in His inspired Word? What does it involve – what do we have to DO?

A Change of Direction

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out ...," said Peter (Acts 3:19).

God tells us there is something we must do before He will apply the sacrifice of Christ to pay the penalty of our sins. We must demonstrate that we no longer wish to continue in the way of life which leads to eternal death. We do so by changing our way of living. That change of direction is called "repentance" in biblical terminology.

But what, exactly, do we repent of?

Sin!

Actions and deeds which are contrary to God's law are simply defined as "sin." Sin is the violation or transgression of any of God's great spiritual laws. Notice the definition of sin in the Bible: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4).

Sin, however, is not always a wrong deed. Sometimes we sin by not doing what is right or good. "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

To repent of sin, then, simply means to "change direction." We turn from the way of self-indulgence and "get" to the way of "give." We stop serving the inordinate lusts of our own flesh and begin to serve others. We turn from selfishness to selflessness.

When we begin demonstrating our willingness to change and ask God to forgive our past way of life, He applies the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. We are then freed from the crushing guilt of sin and its penalty. We are forgiven and our conscience is cleared. The penalty of sin – eternal death – no longer hangs over our head.

Paul explained it this way: "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:14).

How beautifully simple!

Now, let's begin to understand the vital details.

LESSON 7

The "Natural" State of Man

Real repentance involves change on our part. But why change? And change what? To really answer these questions, we need to understand the natural state of every individual prior to repentance and conversion.

1. God inspired the prophet Jeremiah to describe the basic motivations of the human mind. How does our Creator characterize the natural mind, or "heart," of man? Jeremiah 17:9. Is the natural, unconverted mind of every human being grossly subject to vanity and sin? Romans 8:7-8, 20.

2. What are the natural inclinations of the "carnal," physically oriented, unconverted human mind?
Galatians 5:19-21; Romans 1:28-32; James 4:1-3. Where do these attitudes of sin actually originate – who is the "father" of sin? John 8:38-44; 1 John 3:8; Ephesians 2:2-3.

COMMENT: Incredible as it may sound, the natural state of man – what we commonly call "human nature" – is imparted to mankind by that great fallen archangel known as Satan the devil!

Satan is revealed as "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4), who has deceived all nations

(Revelation 12:9). He is further revealed as "... the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2).

Satan works in people by "broadcasting" his basic attitude to the mind. He is actually "on the air," so to speak, surcharging the air around the world. The spirit that is in every human (Job 32:8; 1 Corinthians 2:11) which we discussed in Lesson 5, is "in tune" with Satan's "wavelength." The devil does not broadcast in the words of any language; he does not broadcast in sounds. He broadcasts attitudes of vanity, selfishness, greed, covetousness, lust, jealousy, criticism, envy, resentment, hatred, bitterness and rebellion which our minds receive, perhaps somewhat like a radio receives electromagnetic signals.

These attitudes of Satan in the human mind are actually what we call "human nature". It is in reality Satan's nature which he broadcasts to our minds.

Few people realize that "human nature" has a spiritual side and a physical side. On its spiritual side, it is vanity. Vanity loves to exalt the self. It is self-centered. It is selfish and greedy. It "comes natural" to resent and resist authority.

Even a child begins very early to resist the authority of his parents. As he grows and matures, this tendency to be hostile toward authority increases.

On the physical side, there are "natural" physical pulls and drives that seek to be satisfied regardless of any resultant injury or harm that may come to others or the self. Obviously there are certain physical desires that are not wrong and which God created in us. But when lust and improper use enter the picture, these desires become sin!

3. Therefore, aren't the expressions of Satan's nature criminal in God's sight? 1 John 3:4.

COMMENT: A well-known cartoon series is titled, "There Oughta' Be a Law." And indeed there is a law against the works of "human nature". It is the Ten Commandment law of God. The expression of mankind's Satan-inspired nature is clearly illegal in God's sight!

Let's take another look at the way man's acquired nature expresses itself.

The "natural" mind, under the influence of Satan's wavelength, loves itself above all else. It is extremely selfish. Next to itself, it loves that which belongs to it or is in some way connected to it – persons, concepts, material possessions. All these are a part of a larger "self" – like a little empire.

This "self empire" even broadens to include the social or occupational group of which the person is a member; then it expands further to include his state, region or nation, and ultimately the whole human society with the beliefs, customs and ideologies which are a part of it. This is the "self" that humanity loves ahead of God and ahead of any other supposed opposer or "outsider".

But don't some few people really love others? – "put themselves out" – spending their time serving? Certainly, to a degree, some have learned it is better to give than to receive. Perhaps they have not followed the devil's philosophy as far as others who are totally "out for number one". Perhaps a few of God's teachings in the Bible have "rubbed off" on them.

But most of the time even apparently altruistic deeds have an ulterior selfish motive – believe it or not!

Those whom God will ultimately change from mortal humans to the divine likeness of God – those who will be born as the very sons of God – are those who repent of this "natural" state of mind and its past sinful actions, and then strive to overcome it from that point on.

4. What, therefore, did Jesus say we are to become like if we expect to enter the Kingdom of God?

Matthew 18:2-4.

COMMENT: Most little children do not exhibit the same tendencies of "human nature" as do older children, teenagers and mature adults. We think of very little children as being "sweet" and "innocent," lacking the selfish reasoning of their older counterparts.

But somewhere along the line the attitude of Satan began to make inroads in our minds. We gradually began to be hostile and defiant toward authority to varying degrees. We began to be resentful of being told what to do. We began to be subject to the whims that sprang from the desires of our flesh. Our whole thought processes began to be concerned more with "I," "my," and "me". As a result of the influence of Satan's "broadcasting," we have all fostered and harbored these wrong attitudes.

And so, as Paul was inspired of God to write, "There is none righteous, no, not one ..." (Romans 3:9-18, 23; also see Ecclesiastes 7:20).

Now stop for a moment and contrast the "natural" mind of a human being with that of God. God is not preoccupied with self. He is totally outgoing in character. He loves all people. Rather than take from them, He wants to give them blessings out of His great love and concern for them. He is not hostile, defiant, rebellious, resentful, selfish.

God wants everyone of us to eventually become like Him. Therefore He wants us to turn from and strive to overcome the evil influence of the devil's attitude on our thinking and doing while still flesh and blood. This is essentially what repentance is all about!

It All Began in Eden

When God created Adam and Eve, He made them physically perfect. They were created in the shape and image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). And everything about them was "good" (verse 31).

They were not composed of spirit but of flesh made of the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7; 3:19). And they had a natural self-concern. God gave this concern to humans for a good and wonderful purpose. It causes us to have a natural and proper interest for our own welfare, our lives, our physical bodies.

Remember, God nowhere says that it is wrong or sinful to have a right and proper love for self: "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it ..." (Ephesians 5:29).

However, we are told to love others as much as we love ourselves (Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:33; Ephesians 5:28). It is only when we love ourselves beyond the necessary self-concern, and at the expense of others, that it becomes sin.

When Adam and Eve were created, their nature was "neutral" toward God. It was not antagonistic to God. Neither was there any built-in "programmed" tendency to do right and to obey Him. They were – as first created – entirely humble and teachable, like little children (Matthew 18:3-4).

But then the devil appeared. Cunningly appealing to Eve's natural self-concern, he first tempted her and then Adam (through his wife – Genesis 3:6, 17).

Adam and Eve let the devil appeal to their desire to be "wise". Therefore they took to themselves the knowledge of what is good and what is evil – deciding for themselves right from wrong. In so doing, they rebelled against God's authority, disobeyed the law – the command – He had given them, and sinned. By this act they chose and acquired the "nature" or attitude of sin from Satan.

This is how sin "entered into the world" by one man, Adam (Romans 5:12). And the death penalty has passed on to all; not because of Adam's sin – not by heredity – but because "all have [likewise] sinned" (same verse).

All of us, as little babies, had a humble, teachable nature like Adam and Eve. But as we grew older we unwittingly allowed our minds to be influenced by Satan in the wrong direction. We, too, have therefore sinned (first against our parents, then against God), having become antagonistic, hostile, and "carnal" beyond the mere fact of being fleshly.

An About-face!

The original words in the Hebrew and Greek from which "repent" and "repentance" are translated, mean to turn, to change direction. And true repentance is exactly that. It is a complete about-face from disobedience toward God to obedience, love and cooperation with Him.

True "repentance" is coming to a full realization that we have rebelled against our Maker – against His way and His righteous law. It means that we come to abhor ourselves for our self-willed, rebellious, sinful past. We must be truly broken up and ready now, with God's help, to bury our old natures, quit sinning, quit rebelling and submit to God with all our hearts.

The time of repentance is the crisis of your life. It is the turning point in your entire destiny!

When we are finally brought to real repentance, we mean business. We are ready, in every phase of our lives, to say: "Yes, Lord ... your will be done." In real repentance, we have become completely sick and tired of our own selfish ways. We are truly sorry for our sins – and we are ready and willing to make a permanent change. We are now ready to "turn around and go the other way" – GOD'S way.

Learning this great lesson of our own helplessness, misery and inadequacy apart from God is a vital step toward attaining the real purpose of our lives. Once we have learned this, our Creator can begin the process of creating spiritual character in us by placing within us His Holy Spirit – His nature – which will give us the spiritual power to conquer and overcome the inordinate Satan-inspired pulls of the mind and flesh.

You and I were born incomplete – in great need of personal contact with God through His Spirit. You need to face that fact squarely and, asking God's guidance and help, seek to receive the Holy Spirit!

True Repentance Is of the Heart

1. Should true repentance be a deep, moving and heartfelt experience? Joel 2:12-13.

COMMENT: God will not accept those whose "repentance" is only outward, or where there is no real change of attitude and actions. Notice it again: "... Turn to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with Mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments [outward display]" True repentance requires total mental and emotional involvement.

2. Does a heartfelt repentant attitude open the way to a close and saving relationship with God? Psalm 34:18.

3. Is spiritual repentance clearly toward God? Acts 20:21.

COMMENT: Sin is against God – He is the Lawgiver whose perfect law we have broken. To repent means to be so humbled and broken up by the thought of having rebelled against the living, Holy God – so abhorrent of our deceitfulness, vanity, and selfishness – that in real contrition we turn to God for mercy, forgiveness and the help we so desperately need in order to overcome.

4. What did Job say, when finally stripped of his self-righteous shell? Job 42:5-6.

COMMENT: "Now mine eye seeth thee," said Job. For the first time, after his ego had been deflated completely, Job got his man-centered mind off himself and really grasped that God is the center of the universe (chapters 36 through 41). "Wherefore I abhor myself, and REPENT in dust and ashes!"

Some have thought repentance is merely a matter of being thankful that they are so "good" they have been able to see the truth and are now accepting it. That is not repentance. That is self-righteousness – sin – something more to be repented of.

Everyone of us must ultimately come to see God as Job did. Try to see yourself through God's eyes and put Him foremost in your mind. If you do, then you will begin to love God as Jesus instructs (Matthew 22:37).

At this point you might ask: "I can see the need for repentance, but how would I go about it?"

First of all, you should understand that you can't drum up a deep feeling of abhorrence for your sins and your sinful nature on your own. How, then, is it possible for a human being to come to that kind of repentance? How can one even start to change from self-centered love to God-love? The answer is, it has to come from God!

5. Does God's goodness and mercy lead one to repentance? Romans 2:4. And is He patient and loving in leading one to repentance? Same verse.

6. Is it God who grants us repentance? 2 Timothy 2:25. Also see Acts 11:18.

7. Did Jesus plainly say no one can come to Him unless the Father draws him? John 6:44, 65.

COMMENT: In light of the above scripture, how does one know if the Father is "drawing," or calling him? If you have understood what you have studied thus far, and you want to come to God, you are being called!

Unconditional Surrender to God

Right now, before Christ comes to impose His laws and loving rule on mankind and forces this whole world to submit to Him, He is calling upon individuals to surrender voluntarily to His authority, for to "repent" also means to surrender ourselves to God's will unconditionally.

During World War II, when the Allied High Command called on Germany, Italy and Japan to surrender, they demanded unconditional surrender, which meant the defeated Axis Powers gave themselves up completely – without any strings attached – to the victors.

This is what Christ requires of us today!

Allied armies then occupied the conquered territory, enforcing the will of the occupying powers. Similarly, once we completely surrender – repent – to Christ, and are baptized, God's Spirit comes within us. It then begins to influence our ways of thinking and living. No one thought it strange that the Americans, British or French should claim the right to tell the defeated Axis Powers what to do – to influence and regulate the lives of the conquered. This is the same right that God claims once we have completely surrendered to Him.

Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit does not come within us for the purpose of taking away our free choice or will – our free moral agency. It won't force us to do anything. It will only LEAD US in the direction of God's truth and give us added strength to follow its leading and do the will of God.

1. Does surrendering to God also mean that we put Him ahead of and above all else? Matthew 10:36-38. Does this extend to include our own life also? Luke 14:26.

COMMENT: "Hate" in Luke 14:26 means to love less by comparison as the parallel account in Matthew 10:36-38 shows.

2. Though it sounds paradoxical, did Jesus say that whoever would quit being his old sinful selfish self, and give up or "lose" his life to Him, would live? Matthew 16:24-25.

COMMENT: Jesus is actually talking about giving one's life in total obedience and service to God – even giving up all things, including our own lives, if He should ever require that of us – in return for eternal life.

But repentance – surrendering to God – is not a matter of "giving up" every-thing good. Repentance is positive. Not only do you escape the penalties of sin through repentance, it is also the way to innumerable positive benefits in this life!

Repentance emphatically does not mean we must give up the use or appreciation of material things. What God is interested in is the attitude we have toward material things – whether we seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

God does wish for us to prosper and be in good health (3 John 2). He wants us to give up only those things which are bad for us – which hurt us spiritually and physically. Repentance and conversion make possible our intelligent use of God's material creation through the guidance of His laws and His Spirit.

3. Is surrendering to Christ something to be considered lightly? Or must we first "count the cost" – realizing the depths of what surrendering to God really entails? Luke 14:28-30.

We Must Turn to God's Law

1. How may we become cleansed of sin – made acceptable to God? Is it through Christ's sacrifice and His shed blood which covers – blots out – our sins and reconciles us to God? Romans 5:8-10. What must we do to have this blood applied to us? Acts 3:18-19.

2. Are those whose sins have been forgiven pictured symbolically as having had their clothing made "white" by the cleansing blood of Christ? Revelation 7:13-14.

3. Is white, clean, clothing symbolic of the righteousness – right-doing – God requires of those who would enter His Kingdom? Revelation 19:8-9. What will happen to those whose clothing remains soiled, or full of sin, and have not "put on" the righteousness of God? Matthew 22:11-13.

4. What is David's Holy Spirit-inspired definition of "righteousness" – isn't it clearly the keeping of God's commandments? Psalm 119:172.

5. Isn't it the law of God to which the "wicked" – all who have sinned – are to turn? Ezekiel 18:21-22.

6. Whom did Paul say are justified before God – the hearers or the doers of God's law? Romans 2:13. Did Paul make it plain that even though the unmerited pardon of our sins is by the grace of God through faith in Christ's sacrifice, nevertheless a Christian is obligated to God to keep the law of God? Read Romans 3:31 and all of chapter 6.

7. Isn't this clearly why Jesus said what He did to the young rich man? Matthew 19:16-17. Did Jesus enumerate enough of the commandments to make it clear He was indeed talking about the TEN COMMANDMENTS? Verses 18-19.

COMMENT: Because we can't save ourselves and can't keep God's law perfectly of ourselves, the prevalent teaching today is that Jesus did it all for us – that we don't have to do anything except believe He did it all for us and accept Him as our Savior. Thus, millions today have been led to believe that God imputes Jesus' righteousness to us, counting us as righteous because of His righteous-ness – while we continue sinning.

Nothing could be further from the truth!

Jesus did not live a good life for us – in our stead. We are not excused from keeping God's commandments, striving to live a righteous life, overcoming and growing in spiritual character.

8. Is the law of God good? Romans 7:12. Is it just and holy? Same verse.

COMMENT: The law is the way to peace, to happiness, to joy. It is God's greatest gift to mankind – given to make man happy, to lead him into the full, abundant life, to protect his happiness and lead him into eternal life. The evil results are not caused by the law, but by the breaking of it!

9. How did Jesus sum up God's law? Matthew 22:36-40. In what one word can God's law and the keeping of it be summed up? John 14:15; 15:9-10; 2 John 5-6; Romans 13:8-10.

COMMENT: The whole spiritual intent and purpose of the law is love. Jesus showed that God's law has two basic aspects to it: The first is to show us how to love God, which is the basic intent of the first four of the Ten Commandments. The second is to show us how to love our neighbor, our fellow human beings. The last six of the Ten Commandments teach us how to do this.

10. Is God's law like a mirror which reflects our sins back to us? James 1:22-25; Romans 7:7. Does keeping the law result in blessings? James 1:25, last part.

COMMENT: The law of God is a spiritual mirror into which one may look to find and see clearly the spiritual dirt – sin – on one's mind and heart. The mirror is not responsible for the presence of the dirt, or for the harm the dirt may cause. The function of the mirror – the law – is to show the dirt, so that you may do something about it (repent of sin and become cleansed by Christ's blood) and thus become genuinely free from fears, from misery, from penalties of every kind, and free from bondage to the devil's way.

11. Does God promise material blessings for those who keep His law? Deuteronomy 28:1-14; Leviticus 26:1-13.

COMMENT: We cannot necessarily expect God to make us wealthy, but we certainly can expect Him to provide for all our necessities – and perhaps even add a few luxuries as we are able to handle them – as we strive to please Him.

12. What other great benefits do we derive from obeying the laws of God? Psalm 19:7-11; 119:165.

Everyone Commanded to Repent!

1. Six hundred years before Christ, what was God's warning to the nation of Israel as given through His prophet Ezekiel? Ezekiel 33:7-9. Whose way were the people to turn from in repentance? Verses 9, 11; Proverbs 14:12; 28:26.

COMMENT: The ancient Israelites did that which was right in their own eyes because they were motivated by their natural, disobedient minds (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 8:7-8). They did not have God's Spirit within them which would have enabled them to resist Satan and to obey God. This was because the Holy Spirit was not generally available in Old Testament times.

Ancient Israel's terrible example is a lesson to us who can receive the Holy Spirit. By possessing the Holy Spirit, we can bring forth the "fruit of the Spirit" enumerated in Galatians 5:22-23. But without the Holy Spirit, we – as did they – bring forth the fruits called the "works of the flesh." Some of these "works" are listed in Galatians 5:19-21. All are transgressions of God's holy, righteous, spiritual law.

Mankind today is still learning the hard way by experiencing these "works," or results, of doing what comes naturally.

2. Only a few decades later, did God use Zechariah to reiterate the same call to repentance? Zechariah 1:2-4.

3. What message did God commission the prophet John to proclaim in Judea? Matthew 3:1-8. Notice especially verses 2 and 8. Also see Acts 19:4.

4. What was Jesus' message from the beginning of His ministry? Mark 1:14-15. Did He personally command all of His hearers to repent? Matthew 4:17; Luke 13:1-5.

5. Did Christ say repentance would be preached among all nations? Luke 24:47.

6. When the Holy Spirit came on that memorable Day of Pentecost as Jesus had promised it would (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5), what message did God inspire Peter to preach to the multitudes gathered in Jerusalem? Acts 2:37-38; 3:19.

COMMENT: The same proclamation to repent is a vital part of the message of God's Church in this age. What Peter commanded his listeners to do is what God commands us to do today!

7. Does the Bible show there are no exceptions – that all have sins of which they must repent?

1 John 1:8-10; 5:19; Romans 3:23; 5:12; 1 Kings 8:46; Ecclesiastes 7:20.

COMMENT: There are many who feel they are "good humble folk" who have never personally done anything really wrong in their lives and so have little, if anything, of which to repent. But your Bible says ALL HAVE SINNED!

8. Does God specifically command all people everywhere to repent? Acts 17:30.

9. But if anyone chooses to remain in an unrepentant attitude, what does he lay up for himself? Romans 2:5. What is Jesus' solemn warning to those who will never repent? Luke 13:3, 5. What will be their ultimate fate unless they do repent? Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:15.

Beware of False Repentance

Don't make the mistake of overlooking repentance as a necessary step to salvation. Don't assume that you can be made right with God by some man-devised method which is falsely called "repentance".

Repentance is not only a matter of feeling. It is not just a matter of stirring up one's emotions. It is a matter of heart and mind as well as emotion. It is a heartfelt realization that you have thought, spoken, and lived contrary to God's spiritual laws and that you should QUIT doing so!

1. Can people actually worship Christ, acknowledging that He is "Lord," and yet not enter His Kingdom? Matthew 7:21. How else can one worship Him, and yet not be born of God at Christ's coming?

Matthew 15:7-9. Then who will enter God's Kingdom? Matthew 7:21, last part.

COMMENT: Listen to what else Jesus said about people who want to worship Him without obedience to God's commands: "Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition" (Mark 7:7-9).

Man would rather do almost anything else than surrender himself to God. His natural mind (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 8:7-8) rebels at the thought of submitting to God's law. Therefore men have substituted their own laws and customs for God's commandments, thinking they can still receive salvation by only believing in Christ as their Savior.

Human nature wants to be right, but it doesn't necessarily want to do right! So people often say, "Well, here's the way I look at it" – thus putting their concept of righteousness above the Bible. If it "looks right" to them, it becomes their law. This is nothing but self-righteousness. And we already know where doing what "seems right" to us will lead (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25), unless we repent of this kind of thinking.

Clearly, no amount of human works can bring about the forgiveness of sin. Even the great sacrificial laws of the Old Testament could not bring about forgiveness and a clear conscience. They were only a type looking forward to the supreme sacrifice for sins – Jesus Christ – who was to come much later (Hebrews 9:9-14; 10:4-10).

There is simply no way we can "make up" for our sins. Beads, indulgences, penance, fastings, or afflicting one's flesh in some other way will not erase the guilt of sin either. You cannot punish yourself for sin, and thus avoid God's punishment. Only the sacrifice of Christ can pay that ultimate penalty. And the only way that sacrifice can be applied to blot out your sins is by accepting it and forsaking your past life of disobedience – by repentance!

2. Just what does Isaiah 64:6 say about "our righteousness"? And what did Jesus say about those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous"? Luke 18:9-14.

3. How did Paul describe mankind in general today? 2 Timothy 3:1-5. Notice especially verse 5.

COMMENT: Many people profess to be religious – they attend churches – they have a "form of godliness." But, as these verses plainly show, they partake of the very attitudes and practices that have made this present world evil. This is not the repentance God commands.

God requires a complete reversal in the direction each one of us has been going. In other words, total repentance of following the ways that seem right to human conscience, and a complete turning around to begin following the way of God as revealed in the Bible.

4. What else does God have to say concerning this present evil world we have all had a part in?

1 John 2:15-17; Romans 12:2.

COMMENT: Here is the very starting point on the way to salvation. God commands us to come out of this world and forsake its wrong ways. No longer being conformed to its ways which are contrary to God's way, we are to become like Christ by allowing the Holy Spirit to renew our minds.

5. What is the end result of this world's kind of sorrow, or "repentance"? 2 Corinthians 7:10, last part. But what kind of sorrow for sin does God accept, and where does it lead? Verse 9 and first part of verse 10.

COMMENT: It is commonly believed that a temporary remorseful feeling over past mistakes – without a real "turning" and "change," and beginning to grow in Godly character – is all there is to being "saved".

God says such "repentance" is totally unacceptable and leads only to death!

Repentance is something far more than an "experience." True repentance – "Godly sorrow" – involves a complete about-face in our thinking and being, as well as a change of allegiance.

The Conversion of Moses

1. To what kind of man does God say He will look with favor – one who is humble and meek? Isaiah 66:2; Psalm 25:9.

2. What kind of man was Moses? Numbers 12:3. Knowing what kind of man Moses was, what did God have in mind to do with him because of Israel's disobedience? Exodus 32:9-10.

3. Did Moses succumb to vanity (as most of us would have done) when God said, "I will make of thee a great nation"? What was his reaction? Exodus 32:11-13. Was he actually responsible for causing God to change His mind? Verse 14. Did Moses go around trying to elevate himself above others? Numbers 11:27-29; 16:3-5.

COMMENT: meekness is not necessarily synonymous with weakness, but meekness definitely is the opposite of arrogance. It is the attitude of a repentant mind. Moses was very meek, but he decidedly was not weak. Moses was strong, both physically and spiritually.

The converted Moses was more concerned for the good of others than for self. Above all, he was concerned for God's Holy Name. His life, in general, was truly God-centered (Numbers 14:11-20 – be sure to read these verses).

4. But had Moses always been meek and humble? Or had he formerly been filled with vanity and self-assertion? Exodus 2:11-14. Did Moses at first think he could deliver Israel by his own power? Acts 7:23-25. What did God have to do to humble him? Verses 26-30.

COMMENT: Moses was trained in all the learning of Egypt and was a member of Pharaoh's court. He was the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter (Acts 7:20-21; Exodus 2:10), and was "mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7:22).

But God then began to deal with Moses' arrogance. Moses, in the height of his pride and glory, was struck down. It was God who forced his flight into the wilderness to bring about Moses' conversion. There, for forty years, he was trained – under authority – by a man who apparently really knew the true God (Exodus 2:15-21; all of chapter 18).

When Moses became meek and humble, God showed him that he could, after all, succeed in delivering Israel. But he would have to do it in and by God's power – not his own!

All of us must also at some point in our lives come to realize our own utter insignificance and need to totally rely on God – as did Moses, Job, Daniel, Paul, and other similar examples recorded in the Bible.

King David's Heartfelt Repentance

Ancient King David is a chief example of one who deeply repented of his sins. One specific example of his sins is probably better known than all the rest. David lusted after Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of his military officers. He committed adultery with her. This illicit act resulted in her pregnancy. Then, in an effort to avert suspicion from himself, he attempted a ruse to try to make it appear that Uriah was the father (see 2 Samuel 11).

Failing in this, David had Uriah placed in the front line of battle and deliberately deserted by the army to make certain he would be killed. Thus David became a murderer in God's sight (2 Samuel 12:9). David had sinned very greatly!

But once he came to his senses and realized the gravity of what he had done, he repented of these sins, confessing his guilt: "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord" (verse 13). David's sincere, heartfelt repentant attitude endeared him to God. Psalm 51 shows David's utterly broken-up attitude about his sins. (Be sure to read this entire Psalm.)

1. Did David attempt to justify his sins or to explain them away? Or did he freely confess them? Psalm 51:1-3.

2. What did David beseech God to do for him? Verses 2, 7. Compare with Isaiah 1:16-18.

COMMENT: Hyssop, a small plant or shrub with sponge or brush-like qualities, was a "tool" often used in ceremonies using sprinkled or dabbed blood (Leviticus 14:4-7; Exodus 12:22) to portray forgiveness. Thus David was asking God for spiritual cleansing and forgiveness.

3. Did David admit that he was guilty of many sins? Psalm 51:9. Did he admit that his heart (attitude) had not been right with God? Verse 10.

4. Did David thoroughly abhor his sin? Verse 3. Did he cast himself upon God's mercy? Verse 1.

COMMENT: David did not minimize his sin. He did not attempt to justify it. Nor did he blame it on others.

Rather, he was aghast at what he had done and simply prostrated himself before God and implored His mercy and forgiveness. He made no attempt to "explain it away." He confessed what he had done, what he was, and asked God to clean him up totally.

That's the basic attitude we should have when we repent of our sins.

David was one of the few people of Old Testament times to whom God gave the Holy Spirit

(verses 10-11; 1 Samuel 16:13), for the Holy Spirit was not yet made available (John 7:38-39) except in special circumstances. David obeyed God and overcame by the power of the Holy Spirit, even though at times he did stumble and fall. "For a just [righteous] man falleth seven times, and riseth up again ..." (Proverbs 24:16).

So David – a man after God's own heart – is soon, at Christ's coming, to be resurrected and born into God's Kingdom as a son of God, and as the King over Israel (Jeremiah 30:9).

A Modern-Day Example

There are many ways by which God can bring a man to repentance. We thought it would be of interest to our students to learn how God dealt with Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, President and Pastor General of the Worldwide Church of God [from 1968 through 1986. Prior to that time, from 1933-1967, the organization was known as the Radio Church of God], as revealed in excerpts taken from his Autobiography:

"After the flash depression of 1920 had plunged all my major advertising clients into receiverships, sweeping away the publisher's representative business in Chicago, I hung grimly on for two years. It was futile.

"What I totally failed, then, to realize was that God was beginning to deal with me, to strike me down, to take away the 'idols' of business ambitions, and set me in His work for a very special mission. Jonah tried to escape on a ship from a mission of God. Isaiah protested he was unworthy. Jeremiah argued he was too young. Paul had to be knocked down. But it required several knockdowns to deflate me and wean me from a love of this world.

"It was bewildering – utterly frustrating! It seemed as if some mysterious, invisible hand was just disintegrating every business I ever started!

"That was exactly what was happening! The hand of God was taking away every activity on which my heart had been set – the business success before which shrine I had worshipped. This zeal to become important in the business world had become an IDOL. God was destroying the idol. He was knocking me down – again and again! He was puncturing the ego, and deflating the vanity.

"I had been beaten down. God had brought that about – though I didn't realize it then. This made surrender less difficult. Repeated business reverses, failure after failure, had destroyed my self-confidence. I was broken in spirit. The self in me didn't want to die. It wanted to try to get up from ignominious defeat and try again to tread the broad and popular way of vanity and of this world. But now I knew that way was wrong! I knew its ultimate penalty was death. But I didn't want to die now!

"It was truly a battle for life – a life and death struggle. In the end, I lost that battle as I had been losing all worldly battles in recent years.

"I told God I was only a burned-out hunk of junk. In final desperation I threw myself on His mercy. If He could use my life, I would give it to Him – not in physical suicide, but as a living sacrifice, to be used as He willed. It was worth nothing to me any longer.

"Jesus Christ had bought and paid for my life by His death. It really belonged to Him, and I told Him He could have it!

"From then on, this defeated no-good life of mine was God's. I didn't see how it could be worth anything to Him. But it was His to use as His instrument, if He thought He could use it.

"It was humiliating to have to admit my wife had been right and that I had been wrong, in the most serious argument that ever came between us.

"It was shocking, disillusioning, to learn, after intensive study of the Bible for the first time, that what I had been taught from a child in Sunday school, was in so many basic points, the very opposite from what the Bible plainly states!

"I had argued. I commanded her to stop this ridiculous nonsense. I had said she was crazy!

"Finally I entered into an intensive study of the Bible for the first time in my life. I was determined to prove she was wrong, for her new belief and practice was contrary to the orthodox teaching of the large denominational churches that call themselves Christian. My study started early mornings, lasted often until 1:00 or 2:00 a.m.

"But to my utter disappointment and astonishment I found that the popular church teachings and practices were not based on the Bible. They had originated, as research in history had revealed, in paganism.

"The opening of my eyes to the truth brought me to the crossroads of my life It meant the final crushing of vanity. It meant a total change of life! It meant real repentance, for now I saw that I had been breaking God's law. I had been rebelling against God. It meant turning around and going the way of God – the way of His Bible – living according to every word in the Bible, instead of according to the ways of society or the desires of the flesh and of vanity.

"It was a matter of which way I would travel for the remainder of my life. I had certainly reached the crossroads! In final desperation, I threw myself on His mercy. If He could use my life I would give it to Him.

"This utter surrender to God – this repentance ... was the most bitter pill I ever swallowed. Yet it was the only medicine in all of my life that ever brought a healing!

"For I actually began to realize that I was finding joy beyond words to describe in this total defeat. I had actually found joy in the study of the Bible – in the discovery of new truth heretofore hidden from my consciousness. And in surrendering to God in complete repentance, I found unspeakable joy in accept-ing Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour and my present High Priest.

"Somehow I began to realize a new fellowship and friendship had come into my life. I began to be conscious of a contact and fellowship with Christ, and with God the Father.

"When I read and studied the Bible, God was talking to me and how I loved to listen! I began to pray, and I knew that in prayer I was talking with God. I was not yet very well acquainted with God. But one gets to be better acquainted with another by constant [daily] contact and continuous conversation."

This was the experience of deep, heartfelt repentance Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong went through – as recorded in volume one of his autobiography.

Have You Really Repented?

Have you come to the point in your life where you want to give up walking contrary to God and His law, and surrender yourself completely to Him?

Have you come to the place where you see yourself as you really are – as God sees you?

Have you "sized yourself up" by means of the Ten Commandments, as magnified by the entirety of God's Word, and seen where you fall short? Are you willing to keep all of God's spiritual laws?

Unless you have come to see yourself as Job saw himself; unless you have cried out to God for merciful pardon and forgiveness as David did; unless you have begun to change your attitudes, your thoughts, your actions and your ways; unless you have been really broken up about your past life; unless you have repented from the heart; unless you have made a complete about-face in your life – unless you have done these things, it is clear from what you've learned that you simply have not begun to start the Christian way of life!

The apostle Paul tells us, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ [through the Holy Spirit] is [living] in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Corinthians 13:5). John told the Pharisees and Sadducees, "bring forth therefore fruits meet [fit to show] for repentance" (Matthew 3:8).

How can you examine – prove – your own self? By comparing your life, thoughts, words and actions with the Word of God.

Check the fruits of your life! "By their fruits ye shall know them," Christ said (Matthew 7:20). Does your life reveal the fruits of having the Holy Spirit in you – love, joy, peace,

long-suffering, temperance [self-control]?
(Galatians 5:22-23.)

God looks to those who are of a meek and contrite spirit – those who tremble before the two-edged sword of His Word. God recognizes a repentant attitude of mind – a broken spirit, a humble seeking for forgiveness and mercy. He will truly honor the attitude of all who are willing to turn from works and deeds which His Word brands as sin.

True repentance requires a permanent change of direction. It is a total commitment to a course from which there is no turning back. It is not a temporary sawdust-trail, tear-jerking emotional response so prevalent today. You have learned that it is something much deeper and vastly more profound!

Have you really repented?

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