

Lesson 25

REPENT! REPENT! REPENT!

A man on the street corner, dressed in tattered clothes, looking more angry than compassionate, is standing on a milk crate clutching his Bible and yelling at a generally uninterested sidewalk audience as they pass by, “REPENT, REPENT, REPENT!” Now, I don’t know about you, but that is the picture that comes to my mind when I think of the word “Repent!” Your class may have a similar negative picture of Repentance in their mind. But while Repentance may have a negative connotation for some, it is an extremely important Biblical concept.

What does “Repentance” mean and why should your class listen to what you have to say about it? As is the case almost anytime we stand to teach, creating a desire to hear and a motivation to learn is challenging! I want to encourage you to address their need to be motivated to learn! This topic is essential to their salvation and their successful walk of faith. Now, what is Repentance all about?

Repentance is a concept essential to salvation, but it is a component of a process that is found in every stage of the Christian life. As you will not be able to be exhaustive on the topic, here is a suggested course for your lesson:

Goals:

1. To provide an understanding of the concept of Repentance through definition and explanation of the term.
2. To provide an understanding of how Repentance is an essential component of salvation and sanctification.
3. To give Biblical references and examples of Repentance.
4. To challenge the concept of Repentance in the mind of the student.
5. Finally, and most importantly, to call for Repentance in your heart and the hearts of those in your class.

(The following information is sourced from (1) *Systematic Theology, Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, by James Leo Garrett, Jr., (2) *A Theology of the Church*, by Daniel L. Akin, and (3) *Systematic Theology, An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, by Wayne Grudem, further documentation provided in endnotes. Subscripts of

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these numbers will provide general indication of specific source info. I know you will supplement these sources with your own.)

Definition and Scope of the term Repentance

The concept of Repentance is really found throughout the Christian life, from the beginning to the end. In fact, you may find many commentaries that address Repentance as an essential step of salvation, a necessity to sanctification, and a component in eschatology, or end times. Yes, Repentance will be a component in the end times, both in the repentance of new conversions and the repentance of Christians in their refined relationships with our Lord, but it is deeper than that. The second coming of our Lord will bring about a complete turning of this world into a new era of existence, and the nature of Repentance is central to that process. However, I would suggest that the eschatological component of Repentance may be beyond the scope of your setting. It is most relevant to your class to focus on how Repentance is a part of their salvation and a required aspect of a growing relationship with Christ.

Ok, so let's define the term 'Repentance.' There are two Hebrew terms that were used in the Old Testament to describe Repentance. The term *Shub* means "to turn or return" which is the essence of the concept of Repentance. In fact, the illustration that Dr. Young will most often use to describe Repentance is to place a chair in front of the group facing one way, and to simply turn it around facing it in the opposite direction. This is Repentance, primarily to turn. But the second Hebrew term, *Nicham*, adds depth with the meaning of "lamenting or regretting one's own doings." So the definition is to turn away from going one direction because of regret or lament for one's actions.

It is important to note that changing one's mind and even having heartfelt remorse does not necessarily indicate Repentance. In the Biblical account of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24), the young man "comes to his senses" and realizes the foolishness of his ways resulting in a change of his thinking. But there is a sorrow that laments the unhappiness of a bad situation and that one's deeds have caught up with him. Jesus' description of this man indicates that he not only changed his mind (v.17), but his emotions as well (v. 19), then changing his will (v.18). A change of actions, regardless of how drastic and dramatic in one's life, may not necessarily reflect true repentance.

The inward aspect of Repentance involves the sorrow and lamenting of personal actions and the changing of the will. Another significant aspect of this is that the conviction of sin must come from the Holy Spirit in order to lead to true repentance and salvation. I like what the Anglican archbishop Jeremy Taylor (1613-67) said, that "sorrow is the 'porch' leading into repentance, whereas 'correction and amendment' are the formality and essence of repentance."

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Akin points out that there are two extremes in Repentance that must be avoided. First, some theologians will argue that Repentance is simply a change of the mind. In fact, the most common New Testament term for repent is *metanoeo* and it does mean on the surface to change one's mind. But some have interpreted this as an intellectual process that does not involve the will. A change of mind could therefore result from a gathering of clarifying information about who Jesus Christ is and therefore 'changing one's mind.' This is not Repentance, although the journey of understanding who God is in Jesus Christ is certainly a process that involves change.

Akin defines *metanoeo* as "to change one's way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness." The other term in the New Testament is the Greek word *epistrepho* which means to "change one's belief" in such a way as to "change one's way of living as God would want." So clearly, it is an extreme to say that Repentance is simply a changing of the mind.

But it is also an extreme to see Repentance as a penance. Akin describes perhaps one of the biggest misconceptions of Repentance by the people you will teach in your class. It comes from the Roman Catholic theology of penance, which is "an act of contrition that earns forgiveness." This means that the person attempting penance 'performs a deed or series of works that is intended to earn forgiveness.' Penance is supposed to obtain the right to receive grace. Repentance, by contrast, is a turning away from known sin and does NOT include any attempts to atone for those sins. In fact, we know that we cannot atone for our own sin, but this is an extreme belief that somehow true Repentance involves actions that legitimize our turning towards God. The truth of Repentance is found between these two extremes.

Repentance as a Component of Both Salvation and Sanctification

Grudem defines repentance as "a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ." The renouncing of sin does not come without the involvement of God through the Holy Spirit. The words of our Lord to his disciples are recorded in John 16:8 when he spoke that the Holy Spirit "will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgement, concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me...."

The process of salvation is certainly dependent on this conviction of sin, as well as repentance and acceptance of the work of the Christ on the cross for our sins. However, our sinful nature demands an ongoing turning from our sin in the process of sanctification and throughout the journey of a walk of obedience. Jesus taught his disciples to pray daily for forgiveness of sins just as we forgive those who sin against us. The truth is that Repentance as a singular, one time act would be a cleaner, easier process. But we are called to constantly assess our lives and continually turn back, or return to the God of our salvation

Biblical References of Repentance

In teaching your class, you will certainly want to provide the Biblical references to the concept of Repentance. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, but a collection of Biblical foundation from which you can draw.

Isa. 55:6-7	“... let him return to the Lord that he may have mercy on him.”
Matt. 4:17	“... Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
Mark 1:14-15	“... the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe...”
Luke 15:7, 10	“... more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents...”
Acts 11:18	“...God has granted... the repentance that leads to life.”
Acts 17:30	“... that all people everywhere should repent,...”
Acts 20:21	“...repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”
2 Cor. 7:9-10	“For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation...”
I Thess. 1:9	“... you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God...”
2 Peter 3:9	“that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”
Heb. 6:4-6	“foundation of repentance from dead works.”
Rev. 3:19	“...whom I love, I reprove... therefore be zealous and repent.”

The most likely Biblical passage to exegete this truth is **Luke 15:11-24**, which is the story of the prodigal son. The father and son relationship, the sinful nature of the son, the consequences of sin, and the forgiveness of the father each contribute to the concept of repentance. The journey of the son in reaching a place of brokenness is a perfect picture of the posture of Repentance. May I also recommend **James 4:4-8** as a complimentary teaching of the need for a clear distinction between following God and having a loyalty to things in opposition to God. While this passage never directly mentions Repentance, it illustrates the necessity of turning completely from being a ‘friend of the world’ in order to avoid becoming an ‘enemy of God.’ I particularly like the teaching of James on the compromise of being ‘double-minded’ and the parallel depth it provides to the necessity of Repentance.

A Change in the Concept of Repentance

Of all the doctrinal concepts that we will tackle in this study, the opportunity for life change is perhaps greatest with the idea of Repentance. If that sounds like a bold statement to you, just imagine how it sounds to your class. But when we talk about ‘turning’ from our own sinfulness to face God directly, the upside is tremendous. And the need is there for everyone in your class to respond, whether the person who has never genuinely responded to a call from God, or the seasoned believer who needs to refresh a commitment to their Lord. Perhaps some in your class have a misguided idea of the concept of Repentance. It is a worthy goal to teach in such a way that your class will be changed about their involvement with Repentance.

The challenge in this lesson is to allow the Holy Spirit to communicate the need to repent. May I suggest that you start from a humble viewpoint with a personal assessment? I know you would agree that we must always approach the teaching of God’s Word from a standpoint of personal application. I want to challenge you to place emphasis on this process for this lesson. The concept of Repentance will be demanding for the class if it is received and incorporated into their lives. As teachers, we can only expect it to be challenging to us first.

A Call for Repentance

After your study and preparation for teaching this lesson, I want to challenge you to call for personal response with this lesson. For those who have never responded to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, we should use the topic to challenge towards repentance and an acceptance of Christ as personal savior. For the believer, the concept of repentance should challenge to recommitment. If time permits, offer to be available to pray with anyone personally who is struggling with repentance. Encourage those making decisions to acknowledge them publically at the invitation time of the worship service.

This lesson is a strong reminder to us as teachers that we do not teach to simply increase knowledge, but to call for action and commitment. It would be a shame to teach a lesson on turning back to God without challenging the class to do just that.

Finally, I want to thank you for agreeing to teach doctrinal issues to your class. I know God is rewarding you in this process. I pray that your specific reward is a growing intimacy with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Again, thank you for your commitment.