



The Test of Genuine Repentance

By

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"If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against

me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land. The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes."

-Leviticus 26:40-43

"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death."

-2 Corinthians 7:10

Jesus placed the doctrine of repentance at the pentacle of gospel declaration when He proclaimed...

Luke 13:3 Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

We must not be deceived: repentance is an absolute condition for regeneration.

"Man cannot turn to God without first turning from sin."

-Richard Taylor

Make no mistake, the Biblical Gospel executes an ultimatum that forces men to choose between their sin and God's Christ. Throughout the N.T. we see that Jesus and the Apostles always communicated the full expression of God. They never cloaked the message, they never sought to soften the blow of that gospel hammer. All through the Gospels and into the Book of Acts, the message of the cross is presented in all its brutal power and beauty. The Apostolic preachers always demanded that men forsake all their sin. However, today's gospel message is void of Biblical repentance, if not by direct exclusion, then by subtle implication. Repentance preaching, they say, is "too negative, too offensive, an affront to modern rules of decorum." Thus, the modern pulpit no longer confronts sin, but appeals to the carnal and selfish motivations and desires of the sinner. Therefore, the church is now filled with multitudes who have never been made to see that God commands repentance. True, they may be familiar with the term, yet sadly, utterly void of its fruit. Yes, many will say they have repented, but when pressed, their repentance, must be repented of. *Oh saint of God, the only thing worse than no repentance, is false repentance.*

But thank God, we have His Word to test the validity of our repentance.

In our text, I see five criteria that must be met to pass this Biblical test of genuine repentance.

I. THE CRITERIA OF CONFESSION.

Leviticus 26:40a If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me...

Genuine repentance will side with God against itself. It will, as they say, come clean. Those who have truly repented will admit they were wrong and their sin is wicked.

Psalms 51:3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

When folks are hesitant to acknowledge they are wrong...

It is only logical to conclude that no man can turn from sin without first admitting that he is guilty of sin. Thus, confession is the most basic element of Biblical repentance.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Confess: {Greek} hom-ol-og-eh'-o, To assent, to acknowledge, but above all to make covenant.

The word "iniquity" used in our text, is more far reaching than merely a single act, it means perverseness. True repentance opens the inner eye of the heart to clearly see the gross rebellion displayed in independence from God.

Proverbs 28:13 He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Covereth: {Hebrew} kaw-saw', To clad self.

Those who embrace Biblical repentance offer no evasions, no excuses, or rationalizations. They will denounce not only acts of sin, but the principle of sin that dominates fallen nature. Such men will see that they, within themselves, are altogether unprofitable. Thus, repentant men no longer trust themselves. They see themselves, apart from Jesus, as dangerous and capable of the vilest transgression, and they will admit it. And notice, our text reveals a confession for not only personal, but historic sin.

Leviticus 26:40b ...and the iniquity of their fathers

They're willing to condemn the philosophies and false concepts that led them into a life of rebellion. Likewise, they will rightly see the indoctrinations of a carnal upbringing or a secular education in the light of God's Word. And such confessions will be ripe with shame and grief for the disgrace brought upon the Gospel.

Psalms 38:18 For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin.

Too often today, men are more concerned with the consequences of their sin than the dishonor brought upon God and His kingdom. Such attitudes are far from the spirit of true repentance.

II. THE CRITERIA OF ZEAL AGAINST SIN.

Leviticus 26:40b-41a ...and that also they have walked contrary unto me; 41And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies

Genuine repentance produces a hatred against our former sins.

2 Cor. 7:11 ...yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

As real faith produces works, genuine repentance always inspires a holy zeal against sin. Where there is no zeal and hatred against sin there is only vain repentance. When our denunciations of sin are met with the desperate and frantic hushes of "now-now" and "oh-my" we are among men who still secretly sympathize with sin. Nowhere in the Scriptures do we find the Spirit of God coming to the rescue of sin being exposed. True repentance delivers us from that heart sentiment with sin and sets us free to side with God against our sin. It is by faith in the finished work of Christ that we are placed in union with Him and His cross. Hence, the cross is the only thing that can separate us from the shame and guilt of our sin.

"Confession of sin implies rejection of sin. Its power is broken only as we come into harmony with the Cross. But the Cross is no place of

concealment, of hiding, of covering sin. It is the place where we break with sin, the place of exposure, of guilt, of open shame."

-L.E. Maxwell

Separation, by the cross of Christ, is the key to being freed from sympathizing with sin. Forgiveness is more than merely a judicial pronouncement, but an experiential cleansing. The man who has genuinely repented of his sin won't be offended if you publicly denounce his former sins because Calvary has effectively severed him from his past. On the other hand, oppression, confusion, and uncertainty are often by-products of sin.

2 Tim. 1:7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

So, when men are super-sensitive with the confrontation of sin it reveals a lack of genuine repentance. Notice the word "contrary" in our text, it is a strong term, meaning...

Contrary: {Hebrew} ker-ee', Hostile.

True repentance provokes us to confess/agree that while in any sin we are/were against God and God is/was against us.

So often we hear professing Christians offer telling statements of how they viewed their life before conversion. They say...

"I loved God."

"God was with me."

"God blessed me."

These concepts are all in direct opposition to God's Word and true, Biblical repentance. Hence, those who refuse to acknowledge the utter breach that sin causes in the divine/human relationship have not truly repented.

III. THE CRITERIA OF HUMILITY.

Leviticus 26:41b ...if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled

Genuine repentance produces a humility of heart that readily receives correction from God's Word. When men chaff under the application of the Word of God their repentance must be considered suspect.

For true repentance is to turn from self-government to submission to God's Word. The unteachable spirit prevalent in today's church reveals a void of Biblical repentance. So often men become frustrated, testy, and angry when sin is denounced. This ought not be where true repentance has been exercised.

IV. THE CRITERIA OF ACCEPTANCE.

Leviticus 26:41c ...and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity

Genuine repentance agrees with God's judgment of sin. Now, we know that Jesus has died in our stead on the cross. But do we believe God's judgments, as expressed in God's Word, are truly just? The judgment of God is dodged and ducked in this hour by men who unconsciously

believe they are too harsh. At Calvary, God displayed His utter abhorrence for sin. See the bloody, beaten, and tortured Christ, this is what God thinks about sin. True repentance heartily accepts this brutal expression.

Psalm 58:10 The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.

We don't delight in the destruction of the wicked, but we side with God. I recall a backsliden preacher who had deceived his family, his church, and committed gross sin complaining to me when I pressed him about his transgression, "Cut me some slack, everybody wants to stone me." Such words reveal a lack of genuine repentance.

Perhaps the most hated doctrine of the Bible is the doctrine of hell. Yet, hell is only harsh in the eyes of the unrepentant. And in reality, the greatest terror, the most pressing danger for the sinner is not hell, but God Himself. The most catastrophic moment in the existence of the sinner, is not his introduction to hell-fire, but when he must face the God he spurned for his sin.

Rev. 20:11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

V. THE CRITERIA OF GRACE RENDERING A MORAL CHANGE.

Leviticus 26:42 Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land.

Genuine repentance reaps the full promises of deliverance expressed in the Gospel covenant. Today, many have reduced repentance to mere sorrow for sin. Yet, we read in 2 Corinthians that there is a sorrow that is worldly and useless/worthless. The most basic definition of repentance is a change of mind in regards to sin.

Repent: {Greek} met-an-o-eh'-o, To think differently or afterwards to reconsider.

But to think differently about sin is more far reaching than many suppose. Repentance turns our preference for sin into an abhorrence for sin. Such a change of mind and heart will always yield a corresponding change in our behavior.

"Repentance is a change of mind, as regards to God and towards sin. It is not only a change of views, but a change of the ultimate preference or choice of the soul. It is a voluntary change, and by consequence involves a change of feeling and of action toward God and toward sin."

-Charles G. Finney

This is why the fuller definition of repentance is to turn from all sin.

Proverbs 28:13 He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Accordingly, to call men to repentance is to communicate God's demand that men cease sinning.

Acts 17:30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent...

Though such a thought is unpopular, it is irrefutably Biblical:

Psalms 4:4 Stand in awe, and sin not...

John 8:11 ...go, and sin no more.

1 Cor. 15:34 Awake to righteousness, and sin not...

Few, whether in the church or otherwise, take such claims serious. "No one can stop sinning," they say.

2 Peter 2:14 Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin...

"When there is no fear, there is no change of conduct. Where there is no change, there is only a vain 'repentance.' For it lacks the fruit for which God purposed it - the salvation of man."

-Tertullian

Thus, without a moral change there is no real repentance.

According to the Word of God, these five criteria must be met to prove our repentance genuine: Confession, zeal against sin, humility, acceptance, and moral change. I ask you, dear reader, is your repentance thorough and God-honoring, or is it shallow and incomplete?

-B.W.