



Think Again

In Chapters 3 and 4 of Matthew's Gospel we are told how John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." We learn that Jesus came to be baptized by John in the River Jordan. *And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*



Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And He fasted for 40 days. But Jesus did not give in to Satan's temptations, as we know. Satan tried to use God's word to lead Jesus astray, but Jesus powerfully used God's word to refute the devil's arguments. Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"



After that Jesus went to live in Galilee, which fulfilled a prophecy of Isaiah; and he began to preach, exactly as John had, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

The people who heard John's and Jesus' preaching needed to hear that message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." We

need to hear that message, too. Everyone in this troubled world needs to hear it — because we are all sinners.

(Isaiah 53:6) All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned — every one — to his own way; and the Lord has laid on [Jesus] the iniquity of us all.

(Romans 3:10-11) as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.

All of us are sinners. We all need to repent.

The word "repent" is interesting. For me, the first part, "re," indicates doing something again, as in rebuild, reconsider, and so on. The second part, "pent," could be related to words having to do with thinking — "pensive," for example, means thoughtful. So when I see "repent", to me it says "think again." In other words, change your mind. If you have thought that it's okay to do something that you know is wrong, like a sin or a crime, think again. Realize that it's not okay.

But there's more than that to repentance. The Hebrew word that is translated to "repent" in our Bibles is *sheenbeyt*, which means "return" or "turn around;" but if you go back to the root words in Hebrew, it means something like "destroy the house." In other words, don't just turn away from the wrong things you have been doing; burn all the bridges behind you so that you can't go back!



Any way you slice it, the thought expressed by the command to "repent" in the Bible is this: Change your mind and change your behavior. Turn around; go in a different direction. Whatever you have been doing that's displeasing to God, stop doing it now, and don't ever go back to doing it.

The dictionary says that repenting also involves being sorry; feeling guilty and regretting what you have done, which is true. But understand this: no matter how guilty you feel about it, if you still keep doing it, you have not repented.

True repentance, then, means beginning to live your life differently than you did in the past.

Jesus dramatically said it this way: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* (John 3:3) And Paul emphasized, *if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; the new has come.* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

To repent is to begin and continue in a process that is known as *sanctification*. It’s a fancy word for how God transforms us to be like Jesus — loving God wholeheartedly, obeying Him faithfully and willingly, and loving and serving other people. Thus, to repent is not only to think again; to change your mind — repent means to change your whole manner of living, for the rest of your life!

This doesn’t happen all at once, of course. As I said, it’s a process. The “new creation” of 2 Corinthians 5:17 takes place a little at a time. We start small and then, *speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.* (Ephesians 4:15)

You may be thinking, “Can I do this?” The real question is, do you want to? Because of course you can’t do it in your own strength; but of course you can do it in cooperation with God. You can say, with Paul, *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.* (Philippians 4:13) And you can be confident that *he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* (Philippians 1:6)

And the Lord provides lots of Help, for those who will trust Him. *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.* (Proverbs 3:5-6)

And here is this astonishing promise of Jesus: *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”* (Matthew 11:28-30)

Do you understand what this means? It means that throughout this process, throughout the

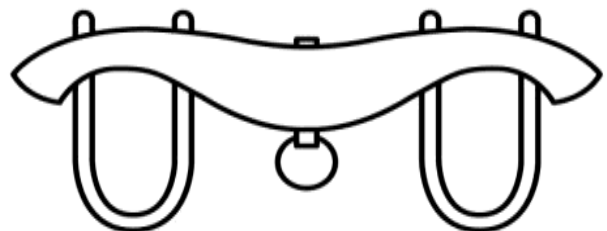
rest of your life, Jesus is offering to share with you the work involved in your transformation and your service to God and others. It makes Paul’s assertion, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me,” a slam dunk, because Jesus, by His Holy Spirit, will supply the strength and the wisdom required to get it done. All you need to do is stay yoked together with Him, and cooperate.

Here’s an important point: When you sin again, and you will, don’t turn away from God or shrink back from Him. Instead, turn to Him, run to Him, and confess your sin, and ask for and receive His forgiveness. Remember what King David did, after his awful sin with Bathsheba and having her husband, Uriah, killed: he pleaded, in Psalm 51, *Have mercy on me, O God ... cleanse me from my sin! ... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation ...*

So with Jesus and John the Baptist I say, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.” What God wants from you, and for you, is that you let Him guide you through the rest of your life, all the way to your heavenly home. Why? **BECAUSE GOD LOVES YOU!**

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25)

Brother Roland





Why Love One Another

by Mary Carothers

In John 5:12, Jesus commanded us to love each other. Have you ever wondered why He did so? He didn't *suggest* that we care deeply about our brothers and sisters in Christ, He commanded that we have love for each other. Jesus felt it was so important that He repeated the command in verse 17. The apostles also spoke of this need to love other Christians (see Paul in Galatians 5:14, John in his letters, and Peter in I Peter 4:8).

This command was stressed, I believe, for several reasons. **For one, love is to be the hallmark of Christians. This is how the world — the unsaved — will know that we are Jesus' followers. This is the proof, as it were, that we are part of God's family. Our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ is evidence that Christ is being formed in us.**

Another reason is that we get enough hate from the world. Jesus told us plainly in John 15 that since the world hated Him, it would also hate us. By "world" Jesus meant the unsaved, particularly those who scoff at the need for salvation – those who feel they are as good as anyone in the church. (And, you know what? They are as good. We all are in need of redemption). Sometimes this hate is evidenced in something as simple as scornful laughter at Christians.

At other times it can be violent abuse, sometimes even mob spirit. Wherever hate is manifested toward Christians, we can be sure that Satan is behind the words and actions, energizing the attack.

Still another reason Jesus commanded us to love one another is that it is so much easier to criticize and find fault with others than to cover them with the love of Christ.

Too often I hear wives criticizing their husbands, or husbands making fun of their wives. Whatever the reasons, when we criticize our spouses, we are doing exactly what Satan wants us to do. **Jesus, on the other hand, wants us to love *all* of God's family, and that includes our husband or wife, parents, children and siblings. He wants us to cover each other with His love. Above all else, love one another, for love covers many sins (I Peter 4:8).**

Jesus told us that a divided kingdom *cannot* stand. This is true in our local church body, our family, or our nation. Satan wants to divide us with criticism and gossip. But God wants to strengthen us and build us up. He wants Christ to be formed in us.

We are engaged in spiritual warfare. The slogan, "The devil made me do it," may be humorous, but it is not completely true. We are not helpless pawns, moved against our wills by master players. We are created in the image of God, with the ability to make choices and decisions. The devil is against us, but God is FOR us. We must choose whom we will follow. We will cast the deciding vote. Whom will we obey? The father of lies, who comes to deceive and to destroy us? Or will we obey the One who created us in love — who promises to always be with us — who loves us with an everlasting love? His command is that we love one another, and He stands ready to help us.

Open our eyes, Lord, to know when we are bringing glory to You, or being tricked by the devil to sow seeds of discord.

If you have a Bible question or a question about the Christian life, send it to me at

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I'll do my best to answer it, and your question may be helpful to someone else as well. God bless you! Please remember your prison chaplain or your pastor(s) in your prayers.

Repent

A life of repentance starts with being born again, newly re-created in the likeness of Christ; then setting our course to walk in that newness of life; and now being available and ready to be used by God every day for His divine purposes. All of that is our privilege and our calling. Enjoy the puzzle.

Puzzle:

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Words:

Who said 'Repent'?	Who didn't repent?	Who did repent?	Results of repenting
JESUS	BETHSAIDA	AHAB	CHANGED LIFE
JOEL	CAPERNAUM	BALAAM	DIFFERENT THINKING
JOHN THE BAPTIST	CHORAZIN	CORINTHIAN CHRISTIANS	LOVE FOR GOD
JONAH	ISRAEL, OFTEN	ISRAEL, SOMETIMES	PEACE WITH GOD
MOSES	JERUSALEM	JOB, LATER	SANCTIFICATION
PAUL	JEZEBEL	KING DAVID	SPIRITUAL FRUIT
PETER	JOB, AT FIRST	MANASSEH	
THE LORD GOD	KING SAUL	NEBUCHADNEZZAR	
	SODOM AND GOMORRAH	PEOPLE OF NINEVAH	
	SOLOMON	SAMSON	
	ZEDEKIAH	SAUL OF TARSUS	