

# Repent and Believe

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## Mark 1:15b

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**L**ets review for a minute this morning. What is unique about the book of Mark? It was the first gospel written and it is the most translated book of the Bible. Who is Mark writing to? Gentile believers at Rome. Where did Jesus go to begin His public ministry after John was imprisoned? Capernaum in Galilee.

**Mark 1:14-15 (NASB)** *And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God,*

What did Jesus mean when He said, "The time is fulfilled?" The time appointed for sending the Messiah had come. Did God tell His people when Messiah would come? Yes, in the days of the Romans Empire. Last week I said the Kingdom of God was synonymous with what? The Church.

This morning we want to look at Jesus' message of the Kingdom: *"Repent and believe in the gospel"*

**Mark 1:15 (NASB)** *and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."*

Jesus began his public ministry by calling people to repentance and faith. Repentance is a term we do not hear much. In fact, outside the church, you'll probably never hear the word. So, what did Jesus mean when he called people to repent?

### **What is Repentance?**

The American Heritage Dictionary says, *"to feel such regret for past conduct as to change one's mind regarding it."* Vine's says, *"A change of mind that involves both a turning from sin and a turning to God. Always, in the New Testament, repentance involves a changing of the mind for the better and always of repentance from sin."*

What is wrong with Vine's definition? He says that repentance involves.... repentance from sin. He tries to define the word using the word.

The Greek word that Jesus uses in our text for repent is the verb *metanoeo*. This word, along with the noun [metanoia](#) [meta/noia] (repentance), are the main words used in the Greek New Testament for repentance.

If we are going to study the Bible, we must have some understanding of Hermeneutics. **Hermeneutics** is the science of biblical interpretation. The purpose of hermeneutics is to establish guidelines and rules for interpreting the Bible. Any written document is subject to misinterpretation, and thus we have developed rules to safeguard us from such misunderstanding.

God has spoken, and what He has said is recorded in Scripture. The basic need of hermeneutics is to ascertain what God meant by what he said. We know that Jesus said *"Repent and believe in the gospel."* But what did He mean by what He said?

One of the principles of hermeneutics is to **Determine carefully the meaning of words**. Whatever else the Bible is, it is a book which communicates information verbally. That means that it is filled with words. Thoughts are expressed through relationships of those words. Each individual word contributes something to the whole of the content expressed. The better understanding we have of the individual words used in biblical statements, the better we will be able to understand the total message of Scripture. Accurate communication and clear understanding are difficult when words are used imprecisely or ambiguously. Misuses of words and misunderstanding go hand in hand.

I think all believers know that Jesus said to *"repent and believe in the gospel"* but all believers do not agree on what He meant by "repent."

Hermeneutics uses two basic methods by which words are defined:

1. Etymology -- which is the science of word derivations.
2. Usage -- which is how the author uses a word.

Which of these two always takes precedence? Usage. Why? Because words can change their meaning over time.

Originally, these Greek words *metanoeo* and *metanoia*, meant: *"to change one's mind."* That is the etymology of the word. But the standard Greek-English dictionary does not list any New Testament passage where the meaning "to change one's mind" actually occurs. Repentance is used most often in scripture to mean: *"turn from sin to God"*:

**2 Corinthians 12:21 (NASB)** *I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.*

The word "repentance" has gotten a bad rap over the years, as if it is a negative thing. Nothing could be further from the truth. Repentance is the most positive thing that could ever happen in your life. When you repent, **you turn from sin to God**. This is not a negative experience! When God calls you to repent, He doesn't shake an angry fist at you, He opens His loving arms to you. We'll expand on that a little later. But I want you to see that repentance is turning from sin to God:

**1 Kings 8:47-48 (NASB)** *if they take thought in the land where they have been taken captive, and repent and make supplication to Thee in the land of those who have taken them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and have committed iniquity, we have acted wickedly'; 48 if they return to Thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who have taken them captive, and pray to Thee toward their land which Thou hast given to their fathers, the city which Thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for Thy name;*

Here we see that repentance is returning to God. Ezekiel says that it is turning away from sin:

**Ezekiel 14:6 (NASB)** *"Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations.*

Repentance—turning from our sin to God—requires that we realize we have disobeyed God. We have violated His law, offended his moral purity, tried to cast off his yoke of authority. This only happens when we stop deluding ourselves that what we are doing really is not so bad when compared to others. It requires that we admit we have turned from God to sin.

Believers, we all have times in our lives when we need to repent, to turn from sin back to God. This should be obvious. Repentance is something that should be ongoing in our lives. The Apostle Paul said:

**Acts 17:30 (NASB)** *"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent,*

Repentance—turning from sin—is a prelude to holiness. Walking in holiness begins with repentance. That being the case, then maybe we should start thinking about repentance differently. Maybe we should start thinking about it as a discipline of our faith a lifetime discipline necessary for a holy life. Maybe we should even think of repentance as a daily discipline. None of us are sinless, so we all should be involved in repentance daily.

Sin is just plain ugly, through and through. It breaks the heart of God, and it ruins the lives of people. If you fail to repent of the sin in your life, it will ultimately destroy you. And it's not so much a question of God "punishing" you for your sins - sin brings about its own punishment. When a parent tells a child not to touch a hot stove, and the child disobeys and does it anyway, what happens? The child gets burned. Who burned the child? An angry, vindictive parent? No, the hot stove burned the child. The loving parent tried to encourage the child not to touch the stove in the first place. This is why we need to repent; to live in sin is to bring great harm upon ourselves.

Although some of our troubles are not the result of our own sins, the fact is that most of them are. Through our sinful behavior, we make major contributions to our misery.

**Galatians 6:7-8 (NASB)** *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life.*

Repentance means that we stop blaming other people for our problems, and we begin to take responsibility for ourselves. Sin is a choice. It's always a choice. You can't blame it on your parents, or your personality, or your nationality, or your situation, or on what the other guy did to provoke you. You have to take responsibility for your actions. For example, your father may have had a bad temper, and you may have picked it up from him. Wherever you got it, you're the one that has to deal with it.

Repentance is not a negative experience, it is a positive experience. When you repent, you turn from doing things that are capable only of creating misery in your life, and you turn toward doing things that will create joy and fulfillment in your life. When you repent, you turn away from the things that are bent on destroying your life, and you turn towards the One who has promised to bless your life

You've probably heard me talk before about Joel Osteen. Osteen is the pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas. It is the largest congregation in America with over 30,000 members. Lakewood recently purchased the colossal Compaq Center, formerly home of the NBA's Houston Rockets. After a whopping \$95 million in renovations, the Compaq Center now houses Osteen's empire.

Keeping in mind that I said: "Repentance is turning from sin." Listen to what Osteen had to say during the June 20, 2005 interview with Larry King.

*KING: "How about issues that the church has feelings about? Abortion? Same-sex marriages?"*

*OSTEEN: "Yeah. You know what, Larry? I don't go there. I just ..."*

*KING: "You have thoughts, though."*

*OSTEEN: "I have thoughts. I just, you know, I don't think that a same-sex marriage is the way God intended it to be. I don't think abortion is the best. I think there are other, you know, a better way to live your life. But I'm not going to condemn those people. I tell them all the time our church is open for everybody."*

*At this point even Larry appears surprised at Osteen's wavering. Larry allows Osteen to clarify his confusing position.*

*KING: "You don't call them sinners?"*

*OSTEEN: "I don't."*

*KING: "Is that a word you don't use?"*

*OSTEEN: "I don't use it. I never thought about it. But I probably don't. But most people already know what they're doing wrong. When I get them to church I want to tell them that you can change. There can be a difference in your life. So I don't go down the road of condemning."*

Believer, you can't repent if you don't think you're in sin. And you can't have fellowship with God apart from repentance. Osteen is doing much more damage than good with his "feel good" message that does not call people to repent from sin.

**Mark 1:15 (NASB) and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."**

Jesus' message is to repent and "**believe in the gospel**" - the gospel is the good news of Jesus' substitutionary death that propitiates the wrath of God for all who believe.

The Greek word Jesus uses here for believe is *pisteuo*, which means: "*to have faith (in, upon, or with respect to, a person or thing).*"

**Faith is always intelligent**, it knows what it is doing. Biblically defined, FAITH IS: UNDERSTANDING AND ASSENT TO A PROPOSITION. If you were to ask me, "Where is my money?" And I said to you, "The check is in the mail." Now, you are either going to believe me, which is faith (you are trusting in what I said), or you are not.

**Romans 4:20-21 (NASB) yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,<sup>21</sup> and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform.**

Abraham believed what God told him, that is faith. No matter what the subject, whether it be God or botany, the psychology or linguistics of belief is identical in all cases. Believing that 2+2=4 is arithmetic. Believing that asparagus belongs to the lily family is botany. Botany is not mathematics-but the psychology or linguistics of believing is identical. Christ's promises of salvation are vastly different from the propositions of botany. But believing is always thinking a proposition is true.

## Repentance and Salvation:

Now let me ask you a very important question, "Is repentance necessary for salvation? Do you have to turn from sin to be saved?" How many of you have turned from all sin? How many of you live a sinless life? How many of you are saved? So you are saved, but have not turned from all sin? *Then you must not believe that total repentance is necessary for salvation.*

One commentator wrote this, *"One of the most spiritual destructive mindsets among Christians is that grace is so free and unconditional to sinners that repentance is not necessary. I would go as far as to say that any Gospel that does not clearly proclaim repentance is a false gospel worthy of condemnation."*

It's a destructive mindset to believe that grace is free and unconditional? If it is not free and unconditional, then it's not grace! The word "grace" means: *"free and unmerited favor shown to guilty sinners who deserve only judgment."* Human merit plays no part in man's salvation.

Another writer said, *"Without repentance, there is no salvation. It is important to know all about repentance. We need to know what repentance is so that we may not be mistaken. It is important to know what repentance is so that it might be brought about in our own lives. Repentance is one thing that man does which affects heaven. All must turn from a life of sin to a life of righteousness if they wish to be saved."*

Who in here has turned for all sin to a life of righteousness? I hope you understand that this is a serious issue. When talking about eternal life, we don't want to be mistaken about how to receive it. Do we? I sure don't! I think that some of the confusion comes because of text like Mark 1:15 where repentance and faith are both called for by Jesus:

**Mark 1:14-15 (NASB)** *And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God,<sup>15</sup> and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."*

Who is Jesus speaking to in this passage? Jews. God's chosen people, those He had entered into a covenant relationship with at Sinai:

**Romans 3:1-2 (NASB)** *Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? <sup>2</sup> Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.*

**Romans 9:4 (NASB)** *who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises,*

Throughout the Old Covenant God had a covenant relationship with Israel. So when Jesus arrives and begins to preach, He is calling the Jews to turn from their sin and return to God:

**Matthew 15:22-24 (NASB)** *And behold, a Canaanite woman came out from that region, and began to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed."<sup>23</sup> But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came to Him and kept asking Him, saying, "Send her away, for she is shouting out after us."<sup>24</sup> But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

As a priest, or as a Savior and Redeemer, He was sent to make satisfaction and atonement for the sins of all God's elect, and to obtain eternal redemption and salvation for all of them, whether Jews

or Gentiles; but as a prophet, in the discharge of His own personal ministry, He was sent by his Father only to the Jews; He was the "minister of the circumcision."

**Romans 15:8 (NASB)** *For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers,*

"The circumcision" is a designation for Israel. Jesus was sent only to preach the Gospel to them and work miracles among them in proof of his Messiahship; and upon their rejection of Him, then His apostles were to be sent among the Gentiles; but He Himself was sent only to the Jews.

I think this is very important in light of Jesus' command to *"repent and believe in the gospel."* Israel was being called to turn back to God—to repent and to believe in the gospel that had been promised to them throughout the Old Testament.

As far as we are concerned today, I don't believe that repentance is part of the gospel message. The four Gospels and Acts present a united front. There is but **one** condition of eternal salvation: **faith alone in Christ alone**. The following references from John's Gospel are clear on this point:

**John 3:16 (NASB)** *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*

**John 6:47 (NASB)** *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.*

**John 11:25 (NASB)** *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies,*

The Synoptics (Matthew, Mark and Luke) also present faith as the one and only condition. However, they do so less often and less forcefully than John's Gospel. Why? Because the Synoptics are written to people who were already believers. References to the Gospel in them are not central to their purposes.

Do you know what book of the Bible is written primarily to unbelievers? It is the Gospel of John! John states his purpose in:

**John 20:30-31 (NASB)** *Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*

*"These have been written"*—this refers to all that John wrote. Why did he write them? *"...that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."*

Now think with me, John wrote his gospel specifically to bring people to eternal life. Yet in the Gospel of John, "repentance" is never mentioned. If repentance is necessary for salvation, John messed up. But the fact that John didn't mention repentance speaks volumes. He didn't mention it, because it isn't necessary for salvation.

The hermeneutical principle called *"the analogy of faith"* suggests that we can best understand unclear passages of Scripture by allowing related clear passages to shed light on them. This principle suggests that one should understand the occasional references to the Gospel in the Synoptics in light of the Gospel of John and not vice versa. John's Gospel clearly says that the sole

condition of salvation is faith in Christ. That will inform our understanding of any so-called problem passage in the Synoptics.

Some passages from the Synoptics clearly confirm that the sole condition of eternal salvation is faith in Christ:

**Luke 8:12 (NASB)** *"And those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they may not believe and be saved."*

The sole condition of salvation given by the Lord here is faith in Him alone. All who believe are saved:

**Acts 16:31 (NASB)** *"And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.'"*

In direct answer to the question, *"What must I do to be saved?"* Luke reports Paul's sole condition: *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ."*

If turning from sin, was a condition of salvation, my first question would be, "How much sin do I have to turn from? Which sins do I have to turn from?" Are those good questions to ask? You bet they are. What would the answer be? You really can't give one, because if you say you must turn from all sin, who would be saved? Nobody!

Let me give you a test to see if you understand this:

**John 12:42-43 (NASB)** *Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; <sup>43</sup> for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.*

Were these individuals saved? Were they Christians? Many would say, "No," because they did not confess Him. But the Scripture says, *"They believed in Him."* And man is saved by faith alone in Christ alone.

### **Repentance brings fellowship, not salvation.**

In the letters to the seven churches, in Revelation, the Lord continually calls believers to repent:

**Revelation 3:19-20 (NASB)** *'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent. 20 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me.'*

*"Behold I stand at the door and knock."* What does this mean? There are two primary explanations:

1. **Salvation** - Christ is calling unbelievers to salvation; He is begging them to let him in their heart.
2. **Fellowship** - Christ is calling believers back into fellowship with Himself. Their pride has caused them to lose fellowship.

The first view is not correct; Revelation 3:20 is not a salvation verse. The Bible teaches that the Lord opens the heart so that a person can receive the Gospel:

**Acts 16:14 (NASB)** *And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.*

Our God is sovereign in every arena, including salvation. Christ is not a weak and helpless deity who begs men to let Him in their heart; He is the sovereign God of the universe who controls all things.

Revelation 3:19 says, *"Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent."* The word "discipline" is the Greek *paideuo* [paideu/w], which means: *"to train a child, to educate, practice discipline, correct."* Every use of *paideuo* in the New Testament refers to **believers**. God only chastens His Children.

After God's warning that He will chasten, He urges the Laodicean's to repent. The word "repent" is the Greek word *metanoeo*. It is a call to separate from sin and enter back into harmony with God. **Repentance results in restored fellowship.** The Lord promises that if the Laodiceans repent, He will **"dine with"** them. The word "dine" is from the Greek word *deipne* [deipne/w], which means: *"take the principal (or evening) meal."* *Deipne* [deipne/w] is the Greek term for the evening meal at the end of the day when family and friends would gather around the table together. This term is also used in the New Testament for the Lord's Supper. It pictures fellowship, communion. **Revelation 3:20 is an invitation for the Laodiceans to repent so that they may fellowship with the Lord.** Their fellowship was broken by their luke-warmness and pride.

Repentance is not a single act, but a lifestyle choice. It is a continuous evaluation that I make as I compare my life to God's word and seek to conform to the image of Christ. As I see areas that are drawing my focus away from God's will, I reset my focus on Christ and align my life with His will. It doesn't mean that I beat myself over the head and live in misery, but instead I choose to keep myself aligned to His Godly path by focusing on Jesus Christ. He is the author and finisher of our faith. Jesus is the only way to be justified and forgiven so that we can have a vibrant relationship with God, and He is also the finisher of our faith. He is the goal we aim for, and the One who equips us to live the Christian life that is beyond our own abilities. Repentance is to recognize that God's plan is good, and my path has no lasting benefit. Martin Luther had it right when he said that every day is a day of repentance.

Just in case you feel like you have sinned so much that God is really sick of it and no longer wants a relationship with you, turn with me to Luke 15. No doubt Luke 15 is the greatest chapter on repentance in the entire New Testament, perhaps in the entire Bible:

**Luke 15:11 (NASB)** *And He said, "A certain man had two sons;*

The Father in this parable represents God, and the sons are believers. When the parable opens, they are sons of their Father; when it closes, they are sons of their Father; and during the parable, they are always sons. Believer, once you are a son of God, you are always a son of God:

**Galatians 3:26 (NASB)** *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*

The parable opens with both sons in fellowship:

**Luke 15:12 (NASB)** *and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' And he divided his wealth between them.*

"Them" is a picture of God providing for us as believers.

**Luke 15:13 (NASB)** *"And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living.*

Here the younger brother leaves the fellowship of his Father. He turns from God to sin.

**Luke 15:14-16 (NASB)** *"Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be in need. 15 "And he went and attached himself to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 "And he was longing to fill his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.*

Here we see God's chastening - he was in want.

**Luke 15:17 (NASB)** *"But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!*

He now realizes his sin and comes to his senses. What brought him to his senses?

**2 Corinthians 13:5 (NASB)** *Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you-- unless indeed you fail the test?*

It might have been self-evaluation. But it may be that we need the help of others so that we see our sin; such as when Nathan confronted David with his sin:

**Luke 15:18-19 (NASB)** *'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."*

Here is repentance. He has realized his sin, and he is confessing his sin and turning from it. In effect, the young man decided, "I want to repair the breach between me and my dad. Maybe I can put things right with an apology and by working for him."

This was a good decision. But it was flawed. His father was not interested in making the bargain his son was thinking about. His dad was prepared to receive him freely. His love for his prodigal boy was not conditioned on any kind of pledge to serve on the farm. Restoring harmony with his father was going to be ever so much easier than he had imagined:

**Luke 15:20 (NASB)** *"And he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him.*

Please mark this. This is God's attitude toward a repentant sinner. Picture God running toward you, He grabs and kisses you. This is the compassionate love of your heavenly father.

**Luke 15:21-24 (NASB)** *"And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry; 24 for*

*this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' And they began to be merry.*

He greets the child with a robe, a ring, and shoes, and he prepares a calf. This is a picture of fellowship. Notice what God says about his son: *"this my son was dead and has come to life again"*. Death is separation. This son was separated from the Father by his sin, but now after repentance he is alive again.

This is the joy of repentance, it brings fellowship with God. The prodigal son represents a Christian who has drifted far away from fellowship with the Father, and who likewise decides to "go home." Perhaps the Christian even plans to "make up" for failure by working extra hard for God. But on returning, once again there is the encounter with that same forgiving love first experienced at the moment of salvation; whether that moment was recent, or in the distant past.

It is always the same; whether we are coming to God for the first time or for the hundredth time. The Father is there with open arms and with an open heart to all who come to Him in repentance.

Believer, if you are living in sin - repent. Turn from your sin to God that you may experience the fullness of His fellowship. When you are in fellowship with God, you will be at peace no matter what is going on around you.

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This message preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on October 30, 2005. [Media #329b](#).



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