

The Freedom Of Repentance

The marvellous effects of true repentance

Note because David confessed and repented of his sins of murder and adultery (see 2 Samuel 12:1-14) and at other times in his life did the same in relation to his other sins (see Psalm 32:5), God saw him as being like a person who had *never disobeyed* at all. In Acts 13:22, God said: “...***I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do My will.***” God knew when saying this that David had committed murder and adultery. Therefore, we can see that our personal confession and repentance results in God treating us as though we had never sinned at all.

When prophesying about the New Covenant relationship God was going to establish with people in the years after Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, Jeremiah stated in Jeremiah 31:34: “...***For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.***” These are amazing Words. The same promise is found in Hebrews 8:12 and 10:17. Teaching from Jeremiah 31:34, Charles Spurgeon said: “*The Lord promises no more to remember our sins! Can God forget? He says He will, and He means what He says. He will regard us as though we had never sinned. The great atonement so effectively removed all sin, that it is to the mind of God no more in existence.*”¹

We have not ruined our lives

Even if you have sinned very badly after becoming a Christian by killing someone or committing adultery or taking drugs, or by aborting a child, or not going to church or doing similar things, do not think you have ruined the rest of your life.

Some Christians are convinced that because they have sinned so much after or even before they became Christians, they will never be able to enter God's perfect will for their lives. They think that because of the sinful mistakes they have made, they will have to live for the rest of their lives at a lower level in relation to His plans for them.

It is wrong to think like this. Even if we have taken drugs, had an abortion, had a homosexual relationship or sinned in other terrible ways after becoming a Christian, we can still see God's perfect will for our lives occur in the future if we do the things stated in Chapter “Repentance” and Chapter “The freedom of Repentance”.

If you doubt that this is true, you have not studied the life of David in the Scriptures. As shown previously, David murdered and committed adultery. He also lied resulting in the death of many other people (see 1 Samuel 21:1-2 and 22:9-19). But as God said through the Apostle Paul in Acts 13:36: “***For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God...***”

Even though David sinned so badly while having a personal relationship to God, this did not prevent him from achieving God's will in the rest of his life. David did not remain in his sins, condemning himself, as so many of us do. Instead, he confessed his sins to God. He trusted God to forgive him of his murder, adultery, lies and other sins. Also he abandoned these sins.

¹ Charles Spurgeon, “Faith's Checkbook”, Moody Press, Chicago, page 52.

David's words in Psalm 51 reveal the above things. This Psalm shows David's attitudes when he wanted to restore his fellowship with God after he committed adultery and murder. Verses 1 to 5 and 7 say: "***Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight – that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me...Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.***" Unlike so many of us, David did not spend the rest of his life hating himself for doing so many evil things.

If David had condemned and hated himself for the rest of his life because of doing so many evil things, he would have been *adding another terrible sin* to his previous sins. This is because it is evil to condemn and hate ourselves after God has forgiven us. Many of us do not realize how evil it is to not humbly accept ourselves after He has forgiven us.

If we sin, we must immediately confess it to God and turn from it. Then we must say to ourselves something like, "I accept myself despite how sinful I have been. This is because God has forgiven me of it and He accepts me."

God works everything for our good

We must remember the truth the Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:28: "***And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.***" Even after we wrongly disobey God's will, He can still work everything in our lives for good, if we love and trust Him.

If we desire to be more dedicated to Him, we should confess and turn from all our known sins every day. Also, we must not let the thoughts of any of our past sins, no matter how bad, prevent us from now becoming more committed to Him and from seeing His great plans achieved in our lives.

A Biblical paradox

In 1 Thessalonians 5:22, God commands believers to abstain from *every* type of evil: "***Abstain from every form of evil.***" James 1:21 states similar instructions: "***Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness...***" The New Testament does not command us just to stop committing some of our known sins, but *all* of them. For example, it does not tell us to stop stealing while allowing us to continue to commit adultery. Note also, after healing a man at the Pool of Bethesda, Jesus told him to "***Sin no more***" (see John 5:14). Jesus said a similar thing to the woman caught in adultery (see John 8:11).

But note there is a Biblical paradox in relation to sin, repentance and the fruits of repentance. Usually the *more* we *change* our thoughts, purposes, words and actions from being involved in known sin, the *more deeply* we see how sinful we are. As we grow in Christ, God will show us many areas of hidden sin in our lives, making us see that without Him we are sinful to the core.

Even if we are not involved in known sin at this point in time, we can still be transformed more into Jesus' perfectly holy image. 2 Corinthians 3:18 relates to this latter fact:

“But we all, with unveiled face, as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord”.

Examining our hearts with the Holy Spirit’s help

It is wrong to become involved in a morbid searching for sin in ourselves every few minutes. But the other extreme is wrong also. This occurs when we blindly always assume all of our thoughts and actions are without sin. We need to first sincerely pray words similar to Psalm 139:23-24: *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”* Then we must obey Lamentations 3:40 and Psalm 119:57-59. Lamentations 3:40 commands: *“Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord.”* Such examining must be done with the help of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise it will probably cause more harm than good.

The evangelist Charles Finney set a good precedent when he said: *“I found I could not live without enjoying the presence of God, and if at any time a cloud came over me, I could not rest, I could not study, I could not attend to anything with the least satisfaction or benefit until the way was again cleared between my soul and God.”*²

Have you or I lost a sense of God’s Presence and supernatural joy at present because of unrepented sin?

Repentance – one key to effective witnessing

It is vitally important we share the Gospel with unbelievers among their relatives, friends and acquaintances. See Romans 10:14-15. 1 Peter 3:15-16 says: *“...always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.”*

But note we can far more effectively witness when we also live godly lives that are good examples to unbelievers. To live godly lives, we must continually repent of any known sin and actively aim to obey God’s New Testament commands through the power of the Holy Spirit. 1 Peter 2:12 says: *“having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”* 1 Peter 3:1-2 declares: *“Likewise you wives, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.”* Such verses do not teach us to aim to please unbelievers by compromising with sin or by avoiding telling them the truth of the Gospel and what God requires of them in response. Refer also to Titus 2:7-10 and 2 Corinthians 8:21.

² Helen Wessel (Editor), “The Autobiography of Charles Finney”, Bethany Fellowship, Minneapolis, 1977, pages 38-39.

A major key to revival and receiving refreshing from God

In Matthew 7:3-5, Jesus commanded: *“And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck out of your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother’s eye.”* This verse reveals that Christians can generally only help other Christians and non-Christians to be freed by God from their sins to the degree the former have abandoned their sins themselves. God is sovereign and can minister to others despite our sins. But Jesus’ Words here reveal a general truth.

For there to be a revival in a local area, there has to be much change by God’s grace among believers in relationship to their heart attitudes to their known sins, God and Jesus Christ. Acts 3:19 infers the most powerful times of refreshing by God’s life and Spirit are linked to repentance about known sin, God and Christ: *“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”*

One aspect of revival is Christians regaining their first love for Jesus Christ if their love for Him has lessened. In Revelation 2:4-5, Christ reveals repentance or having changed heart attitudes to sin and to Him and doing works which are the fruit of such repentance are keys to regaining our first love: *“Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent.”* The evangelist D.L. Moody said: *“because I am one of those who believe that there is a good deal of repentance to be done by the church before much good will be accomplished in the world. I firmly believe that the low standard of Christian living is keeping a good many in the world and in their sins. When the ungodly see that Christian people do not repent, you cannot expect them to repent and turn away from their sins.”*³

One of the foundational emphases of the New Testament is *change*.

Outward measures and God-appointed means of grace

It is unbiblical to say outward measures such as an altar call, raising hands in answer to an evangelistic invitation to be saved, certain types of music, street evangelism, door-knocking evangelism or any other similar thing are the keys to revival. God can use any means. The means He uses at one time or place may be different from what He uses at another.

It is Biblical, however, to say that greater usage of the major God-appointed *means of grace* – faith, repentance (or “metanoia”) and turning from sin to God (or “epistrepho”) – are keys to flowing in the revival-imparting Presence of His Holy Spirit. Faith, repentance and the power to turn from sin to God are given by Him and cannot be worked up by mere human efforts. But they are given by Him to all new converts.

So if we refuse to repent of and turn from our sins and to walk in greater dependent faith in Jesus Christ, we are to blame and not God. We are sinning if we blame our lack of faith, repentance and turning from our sins on God’s sovereignty, claiming He has not given us His

³ D.L. Moody, “The Overcoming Life”, Moody Press, Chicago, 1896, page 37.

ability to manifest these things. God's sovereignty is *linked eternally* to what *He* has *sovereignly decided* are His major means of grace: faith, repentance and turning from sin to Him.

Bible Study Questions

1. What do God's Words in Acts 13:22 reveal about God's view of King David?
2. Is it possible to see God's perfect will occur in the future in our lives if we have in the past sinned terribly after our conversion to Christ? What does the Biblical record of the life of King David reveal about this matter?
3. How does Romans 8:28 apply in our lives as believers?
4. What is the paradox in the Bible in relation to its teaching on sin, repentance and the fruits of repentance?
5. What can we learn from Psalm 139:23-24 and Lamentations 3:40?
6. Explain what Matthew 7:3-5 teaches us about something we must do before generally we can help others be freed from their sins.
7. What does Acts 3:19 show about the relationship between repentance and receiving times of refreshing from the Lord?
8. What are the major God-appointed means of grace? What are some examples of the outward measures we can use in our ministry and evangelism?