**Biblical Repentance:**
**The Need of This Hour**

**by L. R. Shelton, Jr**.

**Repentance and Faith are Inseparable**

Repentance and faith are inseparably connected together in the Word of God, and they must be set forth together. Let us not put asunder what God has joined together.

Listen to these verses of Scripture where these great truths are set forth together in the Word of God! In Mark 1:15, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: REPENT YE, AND BELIEVE THE GOSPEL." In Acts 5:31, "Him [Christ] hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give REPENTANCE to Israel, and FORGIVENESS OF SINS." Again, in Acts 20:21 Paul declared that he had preached "REPENTANCE toward God, and FAITH toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Then one of our Lord's last commandments to His disciples before He returned to heaven, as found in Luke 24:46-48 was, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that REPENTANCE AND REMISSION OF SINS should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem; and ye are witnesses of these things." There are many illustrations given in the Bible of those who came to Christ in confession and repentance, and looked by faith to Him to save them and forgive them of their sins. The thief on the cross repented and believed; the prodigal son repented and believed; and so we call upon men today to repent and believe.

You see, our Lord told His disciples and us as well, to follow His example in preaching repentance and remission of sins through faith in Christ, because this truly shows His ministry while here upon earth. His first message as recorded in Mark 1:15 was, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." And His last words to His disciples and to us were those of Luke 24:46-48, that repentance and remission of sins through faith in Christ should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Yet it seems that many are afraid to preach repentance today. Our Lord was not afraid to call men to repentance, and He has commissioned us to do the same; so we desire to proclaim it to all men that they should repent: that they should lay down their arms of rebellion and turn to God with broken hearts, sorrowing over sin, so they may receive remission of sins in Christ's name because of His blessed work of redemption.

"REPENTANCE AND REMISSION OF SINS SHOULD BE PREACHED IN HIS NAME AMONG ALL NATIONS, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). These are words full of meaning, and that need to be proclaimed today as well as then: that God requires repentance to be preached in Christ's name because He is willing for sinners to be saved; that there is truly remission of sins through faith in Christ for those who see themselves to be sinners--ungodly sinners, lost, without God and without hope, full of sin, full of unrighteousness--if they would come to Christ for repentance, laying down their arms of rebellion and hoisting the white flag of surrender. Unto them God has provided remission of sins; He invites them to come, even as the prodigal came back home.

First of all, I want to declare upon the authority of God's Word that *repentance is to be preached in the name of the Lord Jesus as a* ***grace******given from above***. It is given of God. Yes, repentance has therefore been granted unto the Gentiles as well as unto the Jews because it is a gift of GRACE (Acts 11:18). It does not come to us by the works of the law, but it comes wholly and completely out of the gracious heart of God. It should not be preached in Moses' name as a legal duty, but it is to be preached as a *grace* coming down from God. It is not to be preached like Jonah, without any hope--for he proclaimed that Ninevah would be destroyed in only 40 days--but it is to be preached in Jesus' name as the grace of God, that for those who do repent, there is remission of sins in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Repentance is a gift given by the GRACE of God, even as *faith* is given by the *grace* of God. And it is given because God has highly exalted His Son, and given Him a name which is above every name, having set Him at His own right hand to be "a Prince and a Saviour" for to **GIVE** repentance and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31). So it is the *grace* of God, the *goodness* of God, that leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4). For the very reason our Heavenly Father, our gracious God, has set the Lord Jesus Christ as a Prince, a Ruler, and a King at His own right hand, is that He might *give* repentance and remission of sins!

Wherever there is real sorrow for sin, wherever there is an honest determination by God's grace to cease from sin; wherever there is a complete change of mind with regard to sin (and that is what repentance means), then we can understand and know that *by the grace of God* this repentance has been produced by the Spirit of God, and that it is as much a gift of the *covenant of grace* as ever the pardon which comes with it. And remember, God gives this grace to poor sinners--only to sinners--those in whose hearts He has made to realize their need of it. The song writer expressed it this way:

*Come ye needy, come and welcome, Come,*
*God's free bounty glorify;*
*True belief and true repentance,*
*Every grace that brings you nigh;*
*Without money, come to Jesus Christ and buy.*

It is the *grace* of God that He uses the Law to show us what we are, and it brings us to Christ. So Law is a grace, because it is used by the Holy Spirit to give us the knowledge of sin; therefore, never let us throw off the Law of God! Yes, it condemns us and it damns us to hell, for we have broken it; therefore it brings us under the wrath of God; but we should praise God for it, because it is by the Law of God that we see, acknowledge, and understand our sinnership, our far distance from God, and our great need of a Saviour (Rom. 3:19-20; 7:7-25). For as Gal. 3:24 tells us, the Law is the schoolmaster that brings us--guides and leads us--to Christ as our only hope.

Then it is the *grace* of God as revealed by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that produces in our hearts the salvation that God gives; and along with it is the *gift of repentance*, a sorrowing over sin. But let me warn you, you're not to seek to draw up repentance from the depths of your own heart as you might draw up water from a well, but you are to come to Christ for it; you are to ask Christ to work repentance in you by His Holy Spirit, through belief of the truth as it is recorded in the Word of God, or as it is set before you in the preaching of the Gospel (II Thess. 2:13,14; Rom. 1:16). And it is as you learn how terribly Christ suffered because of your sin, that this truth under the guidance of the Holy Spirit--will be the means of leading you to hate sin; and you will realize how the Holy Spirit, by enlightening the understanding and influencing the affections, produces repentance in you even in that heart that seemed to be unbroken and so sterile that nothing could be produced! That heart will be broken and made fertile by the gentle dew of the rain of *grace* as it falls in upon your soul. Then, by the working of God's Spirit in you, you will see a beauty and a glory in the Lord Jesus Christ that will cause you to desire after Him, (II Cor. 4:4,6; Job 23:3; Song 2:3). And not only will you hate sin and sorrow over it (II Cor. 7:10-11), you will willingly turn from it by faith in Christ as you see what it has done to Him. So God GIVES repentance to sinners; it is one of the free gifts of His grace; and whoever has it may rest assured that the hand of the Lord has been upon him for good-in fact, the work of salvation has already been begun in your soul if the Holy Spirit has been gracious to you in giving you a deep sorrow over sin (II Cor. 7:10).

But let us go further. To preach repentance in the name of Jesus Christ means also that wherever there is real repentance, it is the token of the pardon of sin, for faith is operating in your heart to look away to Christ! It is not merely a hopeful sign that it is going to be done, but it is the sure, infallible sign that pardon has already been given to you! If any man's heart be turned away from sin, if he prostrates himself in the dust before God because of his offences, his iniquities and his sins; if he looks with true penitence and faith to Christ upon the cross crying, "Lord, remember me! Lord, save me! God, be merciful to me, a sinner, and deliver me from going down to the pit," it is not a question whether forgiveness may or may not be granted to that poor seeking soul; it is a fact that he already has it and that pardon has been given, because true heartfelt repentance goes along with remission of sins and true faith in Christ. You cannot separate true repentance and faith; where you will find the one, you will find the other.

We have this so beautifully illustrated in the case of the publican, as recorded in Luke 18:13,14: "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." And the Lord said, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." You see, the Psalmist's word's are still true: "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and *saveth such* as be of a contrite spirit" (Psa. 34:18). It was for such as these that our Lord Jesus suffered upon the cross.

So let the message ring out from every land under heaven: Wherever there is a soul that hates sin, that desires to leave sin and who turns to God from sin (which is true repentance), then there, in that soul, eternal mercy has already been granted, and the gracious work of remission of sins and pardon has been given unto that soul, for faith will look away from self to Christ, and find in Him a sufficient Saviour for all his needs.

Let's go further. Our Lord taught us here in our text also that repentance preached in the name of Jesus means that it is preached in or UPON THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS AS LORD. It is by His authority-by his power--as He tells us in Matt. 28:18-19. Listen! "All power [all authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach [disciple] all nations... in my name." This is what He is saying: It is in the Name of Jesus, *upon his authority,* that sinners bow down in repentance before God, and that every walled fortress of the sinner's heart falls. It is in the Name of Jesus the LORD that the legion of demons must be cast out of the man in the tombs of Gadara. It is in the Name and upon the authority of KING Jesus that every sin must flee and die out, its power broken, its penalty met, its dominion gone, and the sinner set free through faith in His blood; it is in the authority of that Name that he will flee as you plead it, coming to that Throne that has been set up for poor sinners by God Himself (Heb. 4:16).

Also it is upon His authority that remission of sins by faith in Christ is to be preached. Repentance and remission are so joined together, that wherever we find one, we are sure to find the other. Where there is no repentance, rest assured that there is no faith in Christ; but where there is true repentance that godly sorrow for sin that needs not to be repented of--rest assured there you will find faith to trust Christ for full and free forgiveness of all your sins. Our Lord Jesus Christ declared with authority that "All manner of sin... *shall be forgiven unto men"* (Matt. 12:31); the apostles declared it, and we declare this same truth today. In the Book of Acts: "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give *repentance* to Israel, and *forgiveness of sins"* (Acts 5:31). "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38-39). "And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:20-21).

And there is promised in the Gospel to penitent sinners A FULL PARDON OF SIN--from every sin that they have ever committed, whether it has been a sin of thought, word or deed, whether it has been a sin of omission or commission. It is a pardon as great as it is full: pardon from the most horrible and oft-repeated offences; from uncleanness, theft, blasphemy, rape, drunkenness, yea, from whoremongering and adultery, and even from murder if the murderer has truly repented. It is a pardon for crimes of deepest dye, a pardon bought with the precious blood of Christ, for when we turn to God in true repentance, and look to Jesus Christ by faith to cleanse us, it shall be done and we shall be saved!

This is the Gospel, the *hope* that God tells us to hold out to sinners--not as Jonah, who said, "Forty days and Ninevah shall be destroyed!" He said nothing about repentance. But we tell you with one breath that the wrath of God is coming; and with another, that if you will repent and turn to God with full sorrow for sin, with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, there is full forgiveness and remission in the blood of the Saviour. You see, "the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from *all* sin (I John 1:7). For all who truly repent and believe in Him, this blood cleanseth from sin--all sin, and from every sin that banishes men from the presence of the thrice-holy God. Yes, pardon is proclaimed in the Name of Jesus for sins such as these; they are not too black to be forgiven by God; they are not too deeply engrained to be washed out by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus!

But I hear someone saying, "I do not doubt that repentance and remission of sins are to be preached in Christ's name, and that this is the teaching of Christ. My difficulty is, are they for me?" Well, that is a point that you must yourself settle under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but let me ask you a few questions: Have you really repented of your sin? Have you sorrowed over it as the plague of your heart and the curse of your life? Have you hated it? Have you turned away from it and sought to live as the Holy God would have you to live? Then I say unto you: If this repentance is yours, then this remission is yours also, for they go together; Christ put them together: "repentance and remission of sins" (Luke 24:47). And remember, God has commanded you to repent and believe (Mark 1:15), so what He has commanded, you can by His grace perform. You see, by hating sin because it slew Christ, hating it because God is so good that you ought not to sin against Him, hating it because God is so gracious as to forgive it, and hating sin as to weep over it and return to God as your loving Father Who is ready to forgive--this shows us that repentance and remission of sins go together.

But if indeed you have not experientially known what repentance is, then will you breathe this prayer? "Oh Lord, show me the guilt of my sin; teach me to mourn over it, to loathe it and to leave it. Let me see Thy dear Son bearing its penalty on my behalf, and then assure me by Thy Spirit's gracious instructions from Thy Word that my sins, which are many, are all forgiven for Jesus' sake, that I may go on my way rejoicing as a sinner saved by Thy sovereign grace." Will you do it?

**The Fruits of Repentance**

In conclusion, let us consider THE FRUITS WHICH WILL ALWAYS FOLLOW GENUINE BIBLICAL REPENTANCE.

In his message recorded in Matt. 3:8, John the Baptist warns his hearers to bring forth fruits meet [*suitable*] for repentance. Also in his address before King Agrippa, as recorded in Acts 26:20, the apostle Paul tells us that his message to the Gentiles was that they should repent, and turn to God, and do *works suitable* for repentance. So from these two Scriptures we learn that true biblical repentance will *show* itself in the believer's life ***by its fruits***. Let us look then, at some of these fruits, and pray that the Holy Spirit will open our understanding to His precious Word, and that our hearts will be searched and opened, that we may know if these fruits have been, and are being, produced in our lives by the Spirit of the living God.

First, the fruits of true Biblical repentance will be seen in our lives in A REAL HATRED FOR SIN AS SIN, and not merely for its *consequences,* which are: the wrath of God poured out upon every soul which dies outside of Christ, and a separation from God in hell forever. Also, it is not a hatred against this or that sin, but a hatred of *all* sin, and particularly of the root itself which is self-will. In Ezek. 14:6 we read, "Thus saith the Lord God; repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations," and we do this with a hatred for them and a loathing of ourselves. This is set forth in Ezek. 20:43: "Ye shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed." You see, the change of mind which God requires, the change of mind which God is pleased with, is a real hatred for sin as sin *against* God. Therefore I ask--Do you and I have a hatred for sin in this manner? If not, then we have not brought forth the fruits of true Biblical repentance.

Second, the fruits of true Biblical repentance will be seen in A DEEP SORROW FOR SIN. II Corinthians 7:9-10 reads, "Ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner.. for GODLY SORROW worketh repentance to salvation." And such a sorrow is produced in the heart by the Holy Spirit, which has God for its object, for it consists of a grief for having despised such a God, for having rebelled against His authority, and for having been indifferent to His glory. It was such a sorrow that caused Peter to go out and weep bitterly over his sin of denying his Lord (Matt. 6:75). And it is such a sorrow that causes us to weep bitterly over our sins because they have been against God. We are made to cry like David in Psa. 51:3-4: "I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." Have you thus sorrowed for sin as being *against* God? For this fruit of true Biblical repentance causes us to "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24) and to follow God in Christ with all our hearts. Only this kind of sorrow for sin is genuine.

Third, the fruits of true Biblical repentance will be seen in A CONFESSING OF SIN. We read in Proverbs 28:13, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Yes, there *must* be the fruit of confession of sin: confessing all and hiding nothing. You see, you and I both know that it is our nature to deny our sins, directly or indirectly; to minimize or make excuses for them. But when the Holy Spirit works in our souls and our sins are brought to light, there must be an acknowledging of them before God. If true Biblical repentance has been worked in our hearts, then there can be no relief for these stricken hearts of ours until we confess our sins and lay them bare before God. This is brought out in Psalm 32:3-4 in these words: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old though my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into drought of summer." You see, it is only the fruits of a frank and brokenhearted confession of our sins that will bring us peace with God in Christ. This is the change of attitude which God requires, thereby showing true repentance. And my friend, this continues in our life until we get to glory. Confession and repentance is part of the believer's daily prayer, as he pleads I John 1:9 at the throne of grace: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Fourth, the fruits of true Biblical repentance will be seen in AN ACTUAL TURNING FROM SIN. My friend, there are three Greek words used in the New Testament which represent different phases of repentance, and all three of them are seen in the life of the one who has actually turned to God from sin in true repentance. In Matt. 3:2 the word "repent" means A CHANGE OF **MIND ABOUT SIN.** In Matt 21:29 the word "repent" means A CHANGE OF **HEART**. And in Matt. 3:8 and in Acts 20:21 it means A CHANGE OF **LIFE, AN ACTUAL TURNING FROM SIN TO WALK IN IT NO MORE.** So we can say again, true repentance is a radical change of mind and heart that leads to a complete turnabout of our life. It brings about in the repenting believing sinner, a change of mind, which is the understanding; a change of heart, which is the affections; and a change in the course of our life, which comes from our wills.

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso *confesseth and forsaketh* them shall have mercy." If I really hate sin and sorrow over it, then I shall forsake it. I shall take to heart Isa. 55:7, which reads, "Let the wicked *forsake his way,/ and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord; and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." This is the change of course which God requires. It will show itself in the repenting, believing sinner taking heed to the Word of God which says, "Flee fornication" (I Cor. 6:18); "Flee from idolatry" (I Cor. 10:14); "Flee the love of money" (II Tim. 6:10-11); "Flee also youthful lusts" (II Tim. 2:22). And it will also show itself in the putting into practice the positive graces of following after "righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (II Tim. 2:22). My friend, the question before us is--Have you and I from our hearts actually turned unto God from sin?*

*Fifth, the fruits of true Biblical repentance will be seen in A DESIRE TO PUT INTO PRACTICE THE SCRIPTURES THAT TEACH US TO WALK IN RIGHTEOUSNESS AND TRUE HOLINESS (Eph. 4:24), and to be careful to maintain good works (Titus 3:8). This, to me, is one of the most distinguishing marks of true Biblical repentance: the desire to walk in a different way--a different course of life than we did before. We read in Hebrews 12:14, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness,* without which no man shall see the Lord." So by God's grace we desire to follow after this peace and holiness, because God has given us a new heart and a new nature. In Matt. 1:21 we read that Christ came to save His people *from* their sins (not IN their sins), so the heart of the true penitent cries unto God daily to be delivered from sin and self because he hates them. Again, in Eph. 1:4 we read that God's purpose in saving us was to make us holy, so by God's grace we desire to be holy, separate from sin and our self-will. And in I Thess. 4:7 we read that God's purpose in calling us was not to be unclean--to stay in our sins and self-will--but to live in holiness; so by God's grace, we desire to walk worthy of this calling unto holiness.

Then in I Thess. 4:3 we read that the will of God for our lives is for us to be sanctified: that is, to be set apart from God's holy use. So this being true, we desire by God's grace to be separated from sin unto Christ. It is by our desiring and walking in righteousness and true holiness and "being careful to maintain good works," that we can know the fruits of true Biblical repentance are being manifested in our lives. For we read in Titus 2:11- 12 that "the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." And this is the desire of our hearts: to put into practice the denying of ourselves ungodliness and worldly lusts and by the grace of God to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world. Our cry will be, "O Lord, help me to understand Thy Word, and by Thy grace help me walk in the way that is well-pleasing unto Thee." Or like that of the Psalmist: "Shew me thy ways, 0 LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day" (Psa. 25:4-5). And, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Psa. 73:25), so teach me Thy way, and lead me in plain paths, that I will follow Thee all the days of my life."

These then, are the fruits of true Biblical repentance: A deep desire to be finished with sin, because it is the plague and sorrow of our heart; a deep desire to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul, and a desire to fight the good fight of faith; a deep desire never to go back to a way of self-will and self-pleasing, but to show forth the praises of Him Who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light; a deep desire to follow the Lord in a path of holiness all the days of our life; a deep desire to please Him in all our ways; the deep desire to judge ourselves before Him every day and to live at His feet with a broken heart and a contrite spirit.

Sixth, the fruits of true Biblical repentance will be shown in REAL FAITH IN CHRIST. True Biblical repentance cannot be separated from true saving faith; the two always go together. He who truly repents will truly believe, for the same Holy Spirit Who gives us repentance to the acknowledging of our sinful conduct before God, and gives us such a desire to confess it and forsake it with a true godly sorrow, will also turn our eyes upon yon lovely Lord Who died in our place. The Word of God says that the Holy Spirit never separates these graces: repentance and faith. Where you find one, you will find the other in the life of the saved soul, for repentance without faith will despair; it would end in hell. But praise the name of our thrice-holy God, He Who gives repentance also gives saving faith!

Faith finds in the Lord Jesus Christ and His shed blood the forgiveness of God for all sin. By faith in Him we find a putting away and a washing away of all our sins. We find in Christ a complete Saviour Who has undertaken for us before God. We find in Christ peace, because Christ made peace by the blood of His cross. We find in Christ hope, and hope is not made ashamed, because the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We find in Christ a perfect standing before God, because Christ has by God been made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. We find in Christ a perfect hiding place from the wrath of God against our sins, because the judgment of all of our sins has fallen upon Christ. We find in Christ all that God gives to poor, repenting, believing sinners; for we find that we are complete in Him, the Saviour of our souls, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Taken from *Biblical Repentance: The Need of This Hour*