

Repentance and Faith: What Does it Really Mean?

Matthew 3:1–8 (KJV 1900)

1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, 2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. 3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, 6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

Prologue: Thesis of the Argument

Salvation is by faith in Christ alone. The gospel requires that one place his faith in the substitutionary atonement of Christ for his sins. Faith is trust, belief or confidence in something¹. Faith is not merely saying something, even a true thing. The gospel does not include works of any kind: it does not include good deeds, or promises of future good deeds [Eph 2.9; Titus 3.5]. Further, any conditions appended to the gospel beyond faith in the work of Christ constitute human works, even though they may be as subtle as changing ones attitude regarding ones sins. However legitimate and desirable it may be to abhor ones sins, no matter if that abhorrence is a product of the Spirit, *when that attitude becomes a condition of the gospel*, it adulterates and weakens the gospel, which has been clearly defined in scripture.

1 Corinthians 15:1–4 (KJV 1900)

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; 2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. 3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

Therefore, although the gospel always results in a changed mind regarding sin in the one who believes in Christ, one is not saved by *changing his mind about sin* and it is a grave mistake to include this requirement in the gospel. There is an old error, fostered in part by the misinterpretation of the

¹ 31.85 πιστεύω; πιστις, εως f: to believe to the extent of complete trust and reliance—‘to believe in, to have confidence in, to have faith in, to trust, faith, trust.’

Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 375.

meaning of the gospel of the kingdom, that purports that repentance regarding sin is an inextricable element of the gospel. The purpose of this paper is to clarify the call for repentance in the gospel of the kingdom and to demonstrate that the definition of repentance in that context, as well as throughout the New Testament is not turning from sin, *when it is used in connection with the gospel of grace*.

We will show that John the Baptist himself clarified what it means to “preach repentance” in his presentation of the gospel. Peter also on the day of Pentecost demonstrated that if repentance means “to change one’s mind regarding sin” then his preaching would have been a violation of the gospel as given in throughout the New Testament. It would also have been a contradiction of his own future pronouncements concerning salvation [1Pet 1.5, 9, 18-25; 2.6-7]. Peter used the concept of repentance in its proper signification both in his final statement on the subject as here at Pentecost, that is, to turn to God on the basis of his death, burial and resurrection for the sins of mankind [2Pet 3.9].

Acts 2:37–38 (KJV 1900)

37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? 38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

The only condition given by Peter for salvation was to repent². Given that we have a clear statement of the gospel by Paul [1Cor 15. 1-4] and by Jesus [Jn 3.16] and it is not “change your mind about your sins **and** believe in Jesus and be saved,” then neither does the Pentecostal invitation mean that either. The claim that the gospel involves faith in Christ and simultaneously repentance regarding one’s sins must be proven in scripture. The antiquity and popularity of the doctrine are not enough. When Peter calls the Jews to repent, he means *to change their minds about their Messiah* and to believe that the one whom they crucified [Acts 2.36] was the reality behind every Levitical sacrifice, the Lamb of God through whom their sins would be forgiven.

In this study we will demonstrate that when associated with the gospel of grace, repentance means: *a change of mind regarding God and specifically Christ*.ⁱ Repentance in this context of the gospel is therefore a synonym for faith. This change of mind is precipitated by the gospel [and mediated by the Holy Spirit] which brings a realization of the true identity and work of Christ as well as an awareness of the sinful status of the individual. *Repentance is that change of mind in the sinner where he turns to Christ for the pardon and cleansing that is promised in the gospel*.

Furthermore, we will see that the scripture in Matthew 3 does not in vain relate John’s proclamation to the prophecy of Isaiah. The specific call of John the Baptist in Matthew 3 is made to Jews exclusively, during the period in which the Mosaic Law was still fully in force [Mt 23.1-3], on the basis of a promise [Jer 32.36-44] that as given to the nation of Israel alone. Although this context does not change the meaning of repentance, the uniqueness of the offer being made to Israel must be understood to avoid confusion regarding what the word does in fact mean.

² See Appendix I: Repentance in the Dictionaries

Chapter One: The Gospel of the Kingdom

Matthew 3:1–3 (KJV 1900)

1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, 2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. 3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

The urgent need for repentance is because the time is now short, the revelation of the promised Kingdom is at the door, it is now or never.

What is this kingdom that John spoke of and what has it to do with repentance?

The covenant to Abraham [Genesis 12.1-3; 15; 17.1-8] contained earthly elements: the birth of a son, Isaac, the inheritance of a land, Canaan, an earthly kingdom, Israel. However, the covenant infused all of these normal things with a supernatural element that rendered them *eternal*. There would be a Son who would live forever, ruling over an eternal kingdom in an eternal land.

Hebrews 11:8–10 (KJV 1900)

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. 9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: 10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

The Kingdom Requires Eternal Life

In order to inherit the supernatural promises and blessing of this covenant, it was necessary that one *live forever*. An eternal kingdom can only be enjoyed by those who possess eternal life. This idea is what motivated the elders who are listed in Hebrews 11 [vss.1-2, 10, 13-16]. In order to be a partaker of the covenant, one must have expressed saving faith in the God of the covenant.

Genesis 15:4–6 (KJV 1900)

4 And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. 5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. 6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

This truth, *eternal life through faith in the God of the covenant* is the central animating factor of true Israel [Rom 9.6]. The closer the nation to this truth, the greater their blessing, the further away from it, the greater the discipline designed to drive them back to this central truth.

Isaiah 55:1–3 (KJV 1900)

1 Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, And he that hath no money; Come ye, buy, and eat; Yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. 2 Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labour for that which satisfieth not? Harken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, And let your soul delight itself in

fatness. 3 Incline your ear, and come unto me: Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, Even the sure mercies of David.

Mark 12:18–27 (KJV 1900)

18 Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection; and they asked him, saying, 19 Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man's brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. 20 Now there were seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed. 21 And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise. 22 And the seven had her, and left no seed: last of all the woman died also. 23 In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife. 24 And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God? 25 For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven. 26 And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? 27 He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.

The Gospel of the Kingdom: Illustrated in the Law of Moses

The entire sacrificial apparatus of Israel *pointed* to the means by which the sinner entered into this eternal covenant and this eternal kingdom. Although one became a citizen of earthly Israel by circumcision and adherence to the Law of Moses, one could only enter into the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant via the new birth. This is why Jesus expected Nicodemus to understand the concept [Jn 3.10]. For the born-again individual, the Law of Moses was elevated from a civil responsibility to a spiritual discipleship. The Levitical System *illustrated* the gospel of the age of Israel, but it was not in itself a means of salvation. Its sacrifices depicted the sinfulness of man, his condemnation before a holy God and his need for a substitute which would atone for his sins and thus reconcile him to God. This is why perversions of the Levitical system were dealt with so severely, because they were not just corruptions of a ritual, but constituted the changing of the gospel itself in its symbols [Numbers 20.10-13; 1Kings 12.25-33].

Hebrews 10:4 (KJV 1900)

4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

Galatians 3:21 (KJV 1900)

21 Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

Hebrews 11:6 (KJV 1900)

6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

The Israelites were never to believe that the Law or the sacrifices themselves were a means of salvation. These served as a real means of restoring fellowship with God for the individual and the nation, but the basis of that fellowship was always to be understood in the ultimate sacrifice for which the animal sacrifices served as types and pictures.

Completing this picture of the new birth [rather than the Law of Moses] as the gateway into the eternal covenant is the idea of the Lamb of God as the eternal King of the Everlasting Kingdom. The Messiah was the Sacrifice, but He was also the eternal High Priest of the Covenant and the King who would reign forever over the redeemed of Israel.

Psalm 110:1–4 (KJV 1900)

1 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, Until I make thine enemies thy footstool. 2 The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. 3 Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness From the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. 4 The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever After the order of Melchizedek. [Acts 2.20-36]

Therefore, the hope of Israel was not only for material blessing in an earthly kingdom, but an eschatological hope which was only to be realized in the future by those who, by means of resurrection, inherit the Kingdom of God.

Hebrews 11:13 (KJV 1900)

13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

The Kingdom of Heaven was an eternal kingdom that could not be entered unless one possessed eternal life. What exactly then is the gospel of the kingdom and what is its relation, if any, to the Law of Moses?

Gospel of the Kingdom: The Summation of the Old Testament Testimony

Matthew 3:1–3 (KJV 1900)

1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, 2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. 3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

The gospel of the kingdom is a gospel to the "lost sheep of the tribe of Israel" [Mt 10.6; 15.24]. They were lost because they had broken their Covenant and forsaken their Lord [Heb 8.7-12]. The consistent testimony of the Old Testament prophets is this fact of the unfaithfulness of Israel.

Isaiah 40:1–5 (KJV 1900)

1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. 2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, That her warfare is accomplished, That her iniquity is pardoned: For she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. 3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted, And every mountain and hill shall be made low: And the crooked shall be made straight, And the rough places plain: 5 And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together: For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

Isaiah 44:21–22 (KJV 1900)

21 Remember these, O Jacob And Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. 22 I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, And, as a cloud, thy sins: Return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.

Isaiah 59:20 (KJV 1900)

20 And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, And unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. [Jeremiah 3.1, 12-14; Hosea 14.1-2]

The main message of the Old Testament prophets to Israel was to *return to God*. Their sins, as defined by the conditions of the Mosaic Covenant, had separated them from God and broken the Covenant. Repentance in the Old Testament was consistently represented as a change of heart towards God that resulted in realignment with the Law of the Covenant. It is critical to reiterate that relationship with God was demonstrated, *but not caused*, by keeping the Law. Therefore, that same relationship was demonstrated, not caused, by a *return* to proper obedience to the Law. The Law of Moses was a system of discipleship for believing Israel. Consistent disobedience to the Law was symptomatic of a people who no longer even knew the Lord.

The statement "prepare ye the way of the Lord" [Mt 3.3] is taken from Isa 40. The idea is that the coming of the Lord to administer the kingdom is imminent, the times spoken of in Daniel 9.25-26 were fulfilled. It is necessary that the hearts of the people be prepared for His coming. The low, the high, the crooked and the rough must be repaired in preparation of His return. The analogy of Isaiah is between types of roads and type of souls. [A later development of the concept is found in the parable of the soils.] Thus, repentance pertains of a change of mind towards something that is out of alignment with what should be.

The alignment that should first come to mind is to God Himself. It is God who continually called Israel to repentance through the prophets. Century after century God sent men to call Israel back to fellowship and the obedience that makes fellowship possible. The Jews were called to 1.) turn back to God, to 2.) confess their sins and to 3.) meet their covenant commitments as the chosen people of God [Dt 30.2; Isai. 55:7. Lam. 3:40. Joel 2:12, 13]

The Jews broke the covenant and ultimately received the predicted penalty: [Dt 28.15sq] the destruction of the Temple, the end of the monarchy and deportation from the land. Beyond these terrible consequences lay another prophecy: that the Jews would be restored by the sovereign act of God.

Deuteronomy 30:1–6 (KJV 1900)

1 And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, 2 And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; 3 That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. 4 If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: 5 And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. 6 And the LORD thy God will

circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. (Mt 24:31)

In order to accomplish this spiritual transformation, a New Covenant must be invoked. The Mosaic Law had no provision for the new birth. Although it illustrated the way of sacrifice, forgiveness and cleansing, there was no means in the Law by which these were applied to the heart. The Law was a means by which Israel was convicted of sin, that they might perceive their need for a Savior.

Galatians 3:24–26 (KJV 1900)

24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. 26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

In order for Israel to come into proper alignment with God and so qualify for the kingdom, it was now necessary that they have a new heart. ***It is the promise of this national spiritual deliverance that is in view in the New Covenant, which becomes the spiritual basis for the kingdom rather than adherence to or changing one's mind about the Mosaic Law.***

Hebrews 8:7–12 (KJV 1900)

7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. 8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: 9 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. 10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: 11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. 12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

These times are the times that were fulfilled [Mark 1:15]. The times spoken of by the prophet Daniel [9:24-27] and by Jeremiah [31:36-44]. The call to repent was not primarily related to the Mosaic Law, but to a New Covenant which had been promised from the time of Moses and repeated by the prophets throughout Israel's history. A new covenant which is but a paragraph of the original covenant made with Abraham [Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4. Acts 3:25. Gal. 3:8].

Genesis 12:3 (KJV 1900)

3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Thus, the call to the nation of Israel to repent is now conditioned upon its response to this prophesied [New] covenant which is to be the basis of kingdom participation. There could be no acceptable change of attitude towards the Mosaic Law without it. By looking at the biblical references to repentance related to the gospel of the kingdom and other general references to the word repentance, we will be able to determine what is meant by the word and whether it means to repent from sins, as is often and vociferously claimed.

Chapter Two: Repent of What? What is the Object of Repentance in the Gospel of the Kingdom?

In this section we will examine what the gospels and other books of scripture say about repentance, and through this analysis determine the object of repentance in the gospel of the kingdom, as well as elsewhere in the New Testament.

Matthew 3:8–10 (KJV 1900) The Object of Gospel Repentance is God

8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: 9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. 10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Repentance [metanoia] in the Old Testament

“The question of man’s position before God is the question of existence. Everything else depends on it, the relation to fellow-men, the cultus, the state, politics etc. This has to be maintained in opposition to the misunderstanding that the prophetic message of conversion bases its claim to the various areas of life on immanent grounds—a misunderstanding which can easily arise in view of what are often the very concrete requirements of the prophets in ethical, political and other matters.... Sin does find visible manifestation, of course, in individual faults, idolatry, the cult of the high places, political coalitions, moral decay and social offences. But all these individual things form a great single entity when understood by the prophets as the result of a wrong attitude to God. Hence Hos. can depict the relation between Yahweh and Israel in terms of a marriage in which the wife is unfaithful to her husband.⁴⁵ Again, Is. can speak of sons who rebel,⁴⁶ and Jer. can describe sin as forsaking Yahweh.⁴⁷ All these expressions show that sin is simply turning away or apostasy from God. It is the more serious because Israel stands in a special relation to Yahweh. Yahweh has shown Israel favours for which it should be grateful. Again, He has constantly declared His will to it through the prophets and the Law, and summoned it to obedience. Thus sin is a corrupt attitude to Yahweh. It is backsliding from Him, esp. in the sense of ingratitude, unfaithfulness and disobedience.

2. The Personal View of Repentance as Turning to Yahweh. To the personal view of sin corresponds the personal view of repentance. As conversion to Yahweh this must be orientated to Yahweh and His will, for He is Israel’s God³.

Conversion was the basic note in the message of the Baptist (Mk. 1:4 par.; Mt. 3:2, 149 8 par., 11, cf. Ac. 13:24; 19:4; Lk. 1:16). The coming of God’s lordship (→ I, 581 ff.) is imminent and His judgment is close at hand; in the last span of time there is thus only one task for man, μετάνοια. What John advances is the ancient prophetic summons for conversion, for a break with the ungodly and sinful past, for turning to God, because God, active in history, turns to man (→ 984 ff.). But the summons is more categorical than it was on the lips of any prophet, for it stands under the urgency of the eschatological revelation of God. The term which John makes his slogan is familiar to his Jewish contemporaries. It is the epitome of their unwearied and manifold exertions to throw off sin and to fulfil the commandments. But the slogan gives the word a wholly new significance. Conversion is once and for all. It must be genuine and not in appearance only. It is demanded of all, not just of notorious sinners (Lk. 3:12 f.) or Gentiles (Lk. 3:14). Conversion is required of righteous Jews who do not think they need it (Mt. 3:7 ff.). It implies a change from within. This change must be demonstrated in the totality of a corresponding life (Mt. 3:8: ποιήσατε ὃν καρπὸν ἄξιον τῆς

³ Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 985.

μετανοίας, cf. v. 10), 150 a life of love and righteousness in accordance with the will of God (Lk. 3:10–14)⁴.
[all underline-rw]

Martin Luther

“Beware then in putting your trust in your own contrition and ascribing the forgiveness of sins to your own remorse. God does not look on you with favor because of that, but because of the faith by which you believed His threats and promises, and which has effected such sorrow within you. Thus we owe whatever good there may be in our penance not to our scrupulous enumeration of sins but to the truth of God and to our faith. All other things are the works and fruits which follow of their own accord. They do not make a man good, but are done by the man who is already made good through faith in the truth of God⁵.”

John Calvin

“9. Both of these we obtain by union with Christ. For if we have true fellowship in his death, our old man is crucified by his power, and the body of sin becomes dead, so that the corruption of our original nature is never again in full vigour, (Rom. 6:5, 6.) If we are partakers in his resurrection, we are raised up by means of it to newness of life, which conforms us to the righteousness of God. In one word, then, by repentance I understand regeneration,¹ the only aim of which is to form in us anew the image of God, which was sullied, and all but effaced by the transgression of Adam⁶.”

“In regenerating his people God indeed accomplishes this much for them; he destroys the dominion of sin, I by supplying the agency of the Spirit, which enables them to come off victorious from the contest⁷.”
[underline-rw]

There are those who have taught that repentance from sins is an integral part of the gospel formula. Of course, this viewpoint is widely held today and is an old position in some quarters. Yet, as the above citations indicate, there is an equally old interpretation, held by great authorities, that repentance, with reference to salvation, is not an attitude about or decision concerning sins. *Repentance is a synonym for faith, but one that amplifies a particular aspect of faith, that of turning to God.* Faith itself is a response to a true statement, the gospel, in belief or trust. Together, the two concepts reveal the multifaceted nature of belief in God that leads to salvation.

It is an inaccurate statement that repentance, with respect to the gospel, involves changing one's mind about sin, which when added to faith produces eternal life. This is an addition to the gospel and thus an adulteration and weakening of it.

Apparently, the *fruits* spoken of by John in John 3.8 are not identical with repentance, but are the products of repentance. They demonstrate the authenticity of the transformation wrought by one's return to God in faith. God does not need evidence of our spiritual condition, because He knows the thoughts and motivations of every person. However, we need to be reminded about fruits meet for repentance because we need to know that faith without works is dead. The new birth, or conversion, which is what this repentance produces, always results in good fruit [a reference to the production of the new nature 1Jn 3.9]. If there is no new birth in view, then of what possible value would be John's

⁴ Ibid. pg. 1000-1001

⁵ Martin Luther, “the Babylonian Captivity of the Church” Luthers Works, vol 36: Word and Sacrament II ed. Abdel Ross Wentz, gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959) pp. 84-85 quoted in Hodges, Zane Absolutely Free, A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation, (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1989) pp. 223

⁶ John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, Institutes of the Christian Religion, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 159–160.

⁷ Ibid. Pg. 162

demand for fruits meet with repentance? An unredeemed heart [a corrupt tree] cannot produce good fruit. John is speaking of fruit. Jesus has been definitive on this subject.

Matthew 7:17–19 (KJV 1900)

17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. 19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Matthew 3:10 (KJV 1900)

10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

The fact that John expects fruits meet with repentance is an indication that he sees the proper response to his message to be spiritual conversion. This is the same conversion spoken of by Jesus in his conversation with Nicodemus, without which, one cannot even see the kingdom [Jn 3.3]. As already established, the kingdom is an eternal kingdom and can only be entered by those in possession of eternal life.

This is the reason why the genetic lineage of the Pharisees back to Abraham is of no value. The kingdom can only be entered on the basis of the new birth. Repentance is distinct from the fruit that it produces. Good fruit is the consequence and evidence of repentance. Neither fruit or sin are the basis or object of repentance. The gospel is a call for a change of mind about God on the basis of the fact of the cross. *The gospel is not a demand for a decision about sin.* Sin is the basis of condemnation, not salvation. The gospel convicts of sin, in order that the sinner may take the remedy of faith [Jn 16.7-9].

The entry to the kingdom is now by way of the New Covenant. One must be a participant in this covenant in order to participate in the kingdom. The new covenant is entered by faith. The change precipitated by the new covenant takes place in the innermost part of man.

Hebrews 8:10 (KJV 1900)

10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

This relationship with God based upon this spiritual transformation was no secret to the Jews. It was proclaimed in the Old Testament by Moses and by the Prophets. It was symbolized in the covenant with Abram when God placed him in a deep sleep before He pronounced the covenant. There was no work that Abraham could do, there was no attitude or change in attitude he could demonstrate in order to secure the favor of God under the covenant. All Abram could do was believe God in order to receive its benefits [Gen 15.6].

Paul explains in detail why a changed mind about the Law [these are the sins-sins against the Law-that the Jews of that time would have had to repent of under the faulty view of repentance] could not possibly result in right standing before God. Repentance of sins either alone or in combination with faith is contrary to the spirit of the gospel in the Old Testament and in the New.

Galatians 3:4–11 (KJV 1900)

4 Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. 5 He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? 6 Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. 7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. 8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. 9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. 10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. 11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

If the object of repentance is sins, then for the audience of John the Baptist, these sins would have been violations of the Law of Moses. However Paul says that no adjustment to this Law could result in the new birth because the Law is not a mechanism of salvation *or even a part* of what Paul identifies as the gospel, which he confirms has always been the same gospel, even in the times of Abraham. Therefore, you cannot add adjustment to the Law to faith in Christ and end up with a true gospel. If you could not combine these two in John's message or in Jesus' message to Israel, then you certainly cannot do so today.

Many Jews, like the scribes and Pharisees, returned to the Law but not to God. They isolated their spiritual need to a decision regarding sin and they knew that that sin was related to the Law. Therefore they exercised a kind of repentance concerning sin which missed the mark of their true spiritual need.

Matthew 3:11 The Object of Gospel Repentance is Jesus

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

“As for myself, I indeed immerse you in water because of repentance.”

Kenneth S. Wuest, The New Testament: An Expanded Translation (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), Mt 3:4–12.

John's baptism is being contrasted with the baptism of Jesus: they are identical in their cause [man's repentance] but different in their effects. Jesus is greater in power [mightier] and authority [I am not worthy]. One baptizes with water, the other with the Spirit and with fire. One baptism is preparatory, resulting in eternal life and the second is the bestowal of the benefits of the Kingdom [the Holy Ghost] upon the believer or the punishment for unbelief [fire] upon the one who rejects the gospel of the kingdom [the corrupt tree Mt 7.19]. Since the people rejected John, Jesus ultimately proclaimed a dual judgment: in the time of the disciples, a baptism of fire resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of Israel under judgment and in the last days, a baptism of fire at the establishment of the kingdom where all living unbelievers are consigned to hell [Matt 3.10; 24.36-51; 25.31, 41].

Matthew 13:13–15 (KJV 1900)

13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. 14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not

perceive: 15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

The ritual baptism in water did not cause repentance, just as real baptism with the Spirit did not cause it. Both ritual and real baptisms were results of repentance, which repentance issued into right relations with God via the new birth.

Matthew 4:17

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

From the time that John was imprisoned. Jesus proclaimed the same message of repentance that John proclaimed. In Mk 1.14-15 this proclamation is called the "gospel of the kingdom of God".

Mark 1:14–15 (KJV 1900)

14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

"Believe the gospel" is a new phrase. What does this mean?

Matthew 11:2–5 (KJV 1900)

2 Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, 3 And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? 4 Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: 5 The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

This passage corresponds to the following in Isaiah

Isaiah 29:18–19 (KJV 1900)

18 And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, And the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. 19 The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, And the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

The gospel, therefore, applies to faith in the "Holy One of Israel." the gospel of the kingdom centered upon the prophesied Holy One of Israel. Faith in Him justifies and qualifies for kingdom participation.

Isaiah 44:22 (KJV 1900)

22 I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, And, as a cloud, thy sins: Return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.

The gospel, the good news, is that God has redeemed and thereby reconciled his people Israel unto himself [Isa 40.1-2]. This redemption is acquired via believing. Jesus called upon the Jews to believe the gospel [Mk 1.15; 9.42; 16.17; Lk 8.12; 22.67; Jn 1.7, 12; 2.11, 23; 3.12, 15-16, 18, 36 etc.]. Repentance is, in this gospel context, the changing one's mind about God, turning to Him. Faith is belief or trust in the gospel. The two, seen in this light, are complementary aspects of the man-ward side of conversion.

What repentance is not is a second condition for salvation. Repentance a useful concept for Israel who had a real relationship to God but forsook it. They needed to *return* to God. Israel is depicted as an adulterous *wife* in the Old Testament [Hos 1.1-2]. Unlike the Gentiles, Israel had something and Someone to whom to return. The call to *metanoia* [repentance] was reminiscent of [but not identical to because of this new revelation of the gospel] the call of the prophets in olden times.

The return to the Law of Moses was post conversion discipleship *modus vivendi* for the Jews until the crucifixion of Christ. The Jew is and was saved by faith in God, not by faith and legal adherence. Nonetheless, at the time of the proclamations of John and Jesus, national return to legal adherence would initiate the Kingdom [Matt 7.21] since such adherence could not occur without a national return to God via the new birth occurring first. The new birth triggers the implementation of the kingdom [Dt 30.1-6; Jer 31.31-34]. When it comes to gospel presentation, there is no step 1 [believe] and 1a [repent from sin] in order to be saved in any biblical economy.

We do not proclaim the gospel of the kingdom today. This is perhaps why there is no mention of repentance in the entire gospel of John. It is not that men do not need to turn to God, they still do, however the great utility in this form of the gospel presentation was in its resonance to the Jews who were its audience under the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Even the people who insist upon repentance of sins as a part of the gospel, do not include the other elements of the gospel of the kingdom. They do not signify that the kingdom is at hand. They [usually] do not demand a return to the keeping of the Law of Moses. Neither is their proclamation accompanied by miracles, signs and wonders as in the case of Jesus and the disciples. Finally, they do not limit their gospel to the Jews. These persons are recognizing a dispensational distinction when they leave these elements out of their gospel presentations. The clinging to repentance from sins is a remnant of a somewhat Puritan desire to amalgamate the church with Israel, combined with an unfortunate interpretation [if not translation] of the word repent⁸.

Matthew 10:5–8 (KJV 1900)

5 These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: 6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. 8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.

Of those who insist that faith in the blood and repentance towards sins are a single act based upon the syntax of the gospel of the kingdom, none fully adhere to the formula as given above. The gospel of the kingdom was not offered to the Gentiles, because the Gentiles were not heirs to this promise. Although it is true that the Gentiles are beneficiaries of the New Covenant, and will participate in the kingdom, they are not heirs of the Kingdom promised to David and the redeemed Jewish nation.

As we have established, the qualifications for the kingdom involve true Israel. True Israel consists of Jews and proselytes who were born again. This is the meaning of the New Covenant. Paul explains it as follows:

⁸ Enns, Paul P. *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989. P. 478

Romans 9:6–8 (KJV 1900)

6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: 7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children [Mt 3.9]: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. 8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

“The promise” here is the promise made to Abraham or the Abrahamic Covenant. That promise is based upon faith. The New Covenant is a paragraph of that covenant [Gal 3.8]. Paul goes to great lengths in Romans and Galatians to refute the very problem that this paper addresses, which is the attempt to make violations of the Law and our attitudes or actions towards them either retroactively or looking forward to be a part of the gospel solution. Beyond these two books Paul includes a clear definition of the gospel in 1Corinthians 15 which excludes any decisions about sins and a clear presentation in Acts 16.31 which illustrates this gospel in action. Similarly, Jesus Himself provides the gospel to Nicodemus, while under the Law, which excludes this concept. Finally, John the apostle entirely eliminates the possibility of confusion regarding repentance by not using the word in his gospel.

Matthew 9:13 Inoculated Against the Gospel

But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Hosea 6:6–7 (KJV 1900)

6 For I desired **mercy**, and not sacrifice; And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. 7 But they like men have transgressed the covenant: There have they dealt treacherously against me.

2876 II. דָּוָה (hě-sěd): n.masc.; ≡ Str 2617; TWOT 698a—1. LN 25.33–25.58 loyal love, unfailing kindness, devotion, i.e., a love or affection that is steadfast based on a prior relationship (Ex 34:6, 7);⁹

The religious Jews criticized Jesus for fellowshiping with the sinners, persons who openly disregarded the Law of Moses and the traditions established by the elders. Jesus responded to their criticism by quoting Hos 6.6, revealing that these religious men were in fact in a more dire condition than the sinners whom they looked down upon, due to their inability to perceive their own true spiritual deficiency and need.

These Jews had made decisions about the Law; they measured their spiritual life by their avoidance of sin as determined by the Law. One could reasonably say that they had regularly examined themselves and repented of sins. Jesus Himself recommended that the people obey their instruction in the Law [Mt 23.1-3]. One might object that these men needed simply add faith to their attitude towards sins under the Law and they would have been fine. However, Jesus’ point was that no degree of sacrifice can create the effects of the new birth, nor can such commitments [sacrifice] add to the faith required to be converted. The sinners focus was upon Jesus, His person and His message. These alone would and did save perfectly. The religious Jews had been inoculated against the gospel by their incorrect

⁹ James Swanson, Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament) (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

understanding of the purpose of the Law and the improper confidence that this understanding produced. In like manner, those who believe in faith plus repentance from sins *exclude from salvation* all who knowingly disregard their formula.

The sinner, the hamartōlos, is, according to the traditional Jewish view, the man who does not abide by the law and the Pharisaic interpretation of it. Thus he was put on the same level as the tax-collector (Matt. 9:10 par. Mk. 2:15f.) and likened to the Gentile, ethnikos, or the godless, asebes (Matt. 26:45; Mk. 14:41; Lk. 6:32ff.; cf. Matt. 5:46f.)¹⁰.

Matthew 11:20 Immune to the Gospel

Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:

The "mighty works " performed by Jesus were to provide evidence of His Messiahship and to validate His gospel. The result of these was to be the repentance of the Jews resulting in the recognition of their King and the advent of His kingdom.

Matthew 13:53–58 (KJV 1900)

53 And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence. 54 And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? 55 Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? 56 And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? 57 And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. 58 And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

These Jews of the first advent were like the Jews at the first approach to Canaan. They had seen the mighty works God performed in their deliverance from Egypt and their journey through the wilderness. However when confronted with the comparatively lesser challenges presented by the Canaanites, they lacked the faith to proceed. This lack of faith cost them the Promised Land and their bodies rotted in the wilderness. The Jews of Jesus time had the witness of John, the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament and the preaching and miracles of Jesus, yet refused to believe.

A legitimate offer of the kingdom was made to Israel at the first advent. However, as in the first generation to approach Canaan, there was not a sufficient faith response to justify entrance into blessing. Thus the offer was withdrawn to be provided to a later generation who would receive the inheritance by the unilateral action of God Himself.

Joshua 1:13 (KJV 1900)

13 Remember the word which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, saying, The Lord your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land.

¹⁰ [W. Günther, "ἁμαρτία," ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 580.]

Romans 11:25–27 (KJV 1900)

25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. 26 And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: 27 For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

The time of Israel's wanderings became a second window of opportunity for the Canaanites/Amorites whose iniquity had been filled up since the time their final warning of grace began in the days of Abraham. They would have 40 years more to acknowledge the true God before they were scheduled to be destroyed out of the land. The testimony of Rahab to the spies indicated that the inhabitants of the land realized that their time was near and recognized that God was the author of the coming judgment [Joshua 2.9-10].

Likewise today, the disobedience of the Jews has again become the window of opportunity for the Gentiles. This window is in itself a dispensation of grace hidden in the Old Testament but revealed, first by Jesus in the book of John [John 14] and systematized by the apostle Paul as the church, the Body of Christ. The now hated doctrine of dispensations separates Israel from the church and retains Israel's promises and blessings and thus her future, as her own. In His secret counsels God has prepared a new work wherein Jew and Gentile are one in an exalted union with God in Christ.

Matthew 11:21 Hypothetical Repentance finds its Object in God

Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

Here repentance is used in a context that is unrelated to the Law of Moses. Tyre and Sidon are Gentile nations. What then is the object of Gentile repentance?

Romans 1:16–19 (KJV 1900)

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; 19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

In other words, God has revealed Himself to men and therefore holds men responsible for what they do with that knowledge: does it draw them to God and righteousness or do they seek to flee Him and embrace ever increasing wickedness? God reveals Himself by nature, by conscience and by His human witnesses to every human generation. Therefore God has expectations of the nations. Scripture is a testimony to the dealings of God with the Gentile nations. From the Africans to the Canaanites to the Babylonians, Greeks and Romans, God has provided both probation and judgment, in their season.

The only appropriate response to God available to man, be he Jew or Gentile, is adjustment via the gospel. That gospel is the same in every dispensation, faith adjustment to the Second Person of the Trinity as he is revealed at that time. The gospel is the subject of special revelation, which God makes available to every generation through His representatives. We find these men in the days of Enoch and

Noah. We find God's man Melchizedek in Abraham's day. Jethro the Midianite knew God as did the wise men from the east at the time of the Advent.

Therefore the **object** of repentance is always God on the basis of the gospel. The **fruits** of repentance vary by the people and dispensation in question. For the people of Tyre and Sidon at the time of this scripture, the fruit of repentance would be [pre-Pentecost] obedience to the Law of Moses and [post Pentecost participation in the Church. For Sodom and Gomorrah, their adjustment would have been according to conscience, since there would be no Law for another 600 years.

Romans 2:14–15 (KJV 1900)

14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: 15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)

So, even in the case of the Gentiles, repentance is not directed towards sin but towards God. The placement of one's attitude or decision about sin within the salvific formula is to comingle salvation with sanctification. It constitutes a corruption and adulteration of the gospel.

Matthew 12:41 The Repentance of Nineveh: Faith is Distinct from Fruit

The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

Although some would possibly see this account as a proof of the opposite of my contentions, it is but another confirmation of the fact that turning from evil is a *consequence* of believing in God.

Jonah 3:3–10 (KJV 1900)

3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. ⁴ And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. ⁵ **So the people of Nineveh believed God**, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. ⁶ For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered *him* with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷ And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: ⁸ **But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that *is* in their hands.** ⁹ Who can tell *if* God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? ¹⁰ And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did *it* not.

Verse 3 says that the people "believed God." It is no accident that this statement is first in the description of the response of the Ninevites. All that follows this phrase is a consequence of this fact: both the actions of the Ninevites and those of God who also "repented"

Hebrews 11:6 (KJV 1900)

6 But without faith *it is impossible to please him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is **a rewarder of them that diligently seek him**.

The mechanism of divine favor is faith. The Ninevites, like every other person who truly believes, manifests true faith in proper behavior. It should be remembered that reprobate Israel had kept much of the Law, King Saul had been a moral man, the Pharisees were acknowledged by Jesus as examples of Law abiding, yet all were rejected because of a lack of faith. God does not need to see works to know that faith exists; he communicates in a language of accommodation that we may see that faith without works is dead.

Again the object of repentance is God and the fruit of repentance are good works.

Mark 1:4 All Additions to Scriptural Faith Are Works

John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

There is only one way for sins to be remitted. This solution applies to all dispensations and all persons.

Romans 3:21–25 (KJV 1900)

21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; 22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: ²³ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ²⁴ Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: ²⁵ Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare **his righteousness for the remission of sins** that are past, through the forbearance of God;

Paul confirms that the Law and the Prophets testify to the inability of one's attitude towards the Law to produce remission of sins. Therefore this truth should have been known to those who knew the Old Testament revelation and certainly to John the Baptist. No adjustment to the Law and no change of volition about anything other than Jesus Christ can result in remission of sins.

Further, it is the blood, and only the blood, that is the proper ground of faith. The scriptures do not make repentance regarding sins as a condition of the new birth.

Romans 3:20 (KJV 1900)

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

Acts 10:43 (KJV 1900)

43 To him **give all the prophets witness**, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive **remission of sins**.

It is sometimes argued that repentance regarding sins is not a work. However all actions added to faith in the blood of Christ, be they physical or cerebral are additions to scriptural faith and therefore works.

John 3:16, 36 (KJV 1900)

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. ³⁶ He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

1 Corinthians 15:1–4 (KJV 1900)

1 Moreover, brethren, **I declare unto you the gospel** which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; ² **By which also ye are saved**, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. ³ For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; ⁴ And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

Although many preachers have added to this proclamation of the gospel the need for a "simultaneous" act of repentance towards sin, this is not a grammatical nor logical conclusion that can be made from this text. As certain as a change of mind regarding sin is for the one who believes, it is never made a condition of the new birth. Both attitudes and actions regarding sin belong to the effects of salvation, not its cause.

Acts 2:38 (KJV 1900)

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

It is interesting to note that when a person adds baptism to the gospel as a condition of the new birth they are properly called heretical.

Based upon the New Testament descriptions of the Gospel this statement cannot be construed to mean that repentance from sins resulted in remission of sins or anything else. As we have already shown, there is no precedent in the gospel of the kingdom for the idea of remitting of sins as a consequence of a change in ones thinking about sins. As we have seen, only the redeemed individual could inherit the kingdom and only the redeemed nation could get into the alignment with the law necessary for national qualification for the kingdom. Nor is this a statement that can be construed to include both a call to faith in Christ **and** a call to repentance for sins **as the grounds for the new birth**. Neither John or Jesus was proclaiming salvation as a result of both principles.

In fact Jesus Himself indicates the single sin which is the object of saving repentance:

John 16:8–9 (KJV 1900)

8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:
⁹ **Of sin, because they believe not on me;**

In the Old Testament as well as the New Testament the object of repentance was God, specifically Jesus Christ. The one who repented must have changed his mind about Christ. If this is what is meant by "simultaneous" repentance then there is no doctrinal problem. However this is not what is meant by many pastors and thus the gospel is undermined due to too much zeal.

Mark 1:14–15 Israel, Return to Your God

14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

The imprisonment of John combined with the absence of a national repentance in response to his message signaled clearly the rejection of the Kingdom by Israel. Jesus nonetheless continued the call to Israel to return to God and their covenant commitments [Mt 23.1-3], initiating the Kingdom thereby.

Matthew 21:34–38 (KJV 1900)

34 And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. 35 And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. 37 But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. 38 But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

As in this parable, after hearing from the prophets, John being their greatest, the Jews were sent the most important Witness, bearing the same message from the Father. This gospel proclaimed by Jesus was the same one proclaimed by John, therefore I will quote the remarks made earlier regarding the significance of this message to Israel.

“The main message of the Old Testament prophets to Israel was to return to God. Their sins, as defined by the conditions of the Mosaic Covenant, had separated them from God and broken that Covenant. Repentance in the Old Testament was consistently represented as a change of heart towards God that resulted in realignment with the Law of the Covenant. It is critical to reiterate that relationship with God was demonstrated, but not caused, by keeping the Law. Therefore the restoration of that same relationship was demonstrated, not caused, by a return to proper obedience to the Law. The Law of Moses was a system of discipleship for believing Israel. Consistent disobedience to the Law was symptomatic of a people who no longer even knew the Lord.” Ibid pg. 5-6

It is a serious thing to change the object of repentance from God to sin. We cannot evade this issue by claiming that repentance of sins is a “flip side” of or simultaneous to faith. Such claims cannot be accepted on the basis of antiquity or “majority rules” but only by scripture evidence. Sin is the basis of condemnation and not the basis of salvation [Rom 5.18-19]. God is the object of repentance and the facts of the gospel are the object of faith and trust. Both repentance and faith, when applied to the gospel, find their objects in God: His Person and His Work. One’s attitude towards sin is not a condition of salvation nor is any decision a person might make about his sins *a prerequisite to the new birth* either before or simultaneous to belief in the gospel.

Romans 5:18–19 (KJV 1900)

18 Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. 19 For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

The attitude of the unbeliever towards sin is changed by the goodness and mercy of God, by the conviction of the Spirit, through the instrumentality of preaching, the witness of godly lifestyles and even providential experiences in life. As real as these changes in the heart may be they are not conversion, though they may be precursors to it. Nor are they instrumental in the actual new birth, which is always produced by the gospel through faith, without admixture of any human contribution, including emotions or decisions regarding sin.

Salvation results in God's decisive action against sin in the one who believes. God acts sovereignly in the one who believes to pardon, to impute divine righteousness and to impart a new nature. All of these actions[and more] address man's sin problem. However his sin is not the target of faith or repentance. God and His work through Christ are the target of both.

On the other side of salvation, the believers discipleship is enabled by a new nature that is resistant to sin [1Jn 3.9], accompanied by an indwelling Paraclete who enables increasing victory over the still present, but defeated sin nature. It is the Spirit filled life which constitutes the discipleship of the church age believer, a far more effective means of sanctification than that provided by the Mosaic prescriptions.

Whatever our pre-salvation attitudes about sin, they possess no saving power nor do they make faith more effective. The attitude of the individual regarding sins is of great significance only as an element of sanctification, a process which pertains to the believer only. The priority of the sinner and of the witness must be first and foremost faith and trust in the substance of the gospel.

1 Corinthians 15:3–4 (KJV 1900)

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

“First of all (ἐν πρώτοις [en prōtois]). Among first things. In primis. Not to time, but to importance¹¹.“

Repentance and Faith in Paul's Epistles

In as much as Jesus made the statement to “repent ye and believe”[Mark 1.14-15] it is instructive to compare similar statements found elsewhere in the New Testament record.

Acts 19:4

4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.

This passage, where Paul encounters some baptized under John, also includes the concepts of repentance and belief adjacently.

¹¹ A.T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), 1 Co 15:3.

Here metanoia is used for repentance, the typical word for the concept of a change of mind used in the context of the gospel of the kingdom. Paul distinguished the gospel of repentance under John, with the mature doctrine of Christ that exists post Pentecost [thus affirming a dispensational distinction]. In his summary of the doctrine of John's gospel, Paul notes that the object of this repentance was faith in One who was soon to come. As was his habit in gospel presentation, Paul added no language regarding repentance of sins to the gospel [Acts 16.31; Rom 10.9-10; 1Cor 15.1-4. It might be usefully added that repentance does not occur in the gospel of the apostle John, which is provided for the express purpose as an aid to the salvation of men [Jn 20.31]

In Paul's epistles there are two references to the word repentance that are gospel related.

Romans 2:4

4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

Paul's gospel is defined in the context which produced the argument of chapter 2 of Romans. That gospel is as follows:

Romans 1:16–17 (KJV 1900)

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

2 Timothy 2:24–26

24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, 25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; 26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

Again, this repentance leads to a proper understanding of truth, which in turn removes from the "snare of the devil." The individual does not have to make a decision about the snare of the devil in order to be saved, nor is his attitude regarding the snare at issue. The gospel frees from demonic involvement, but demonic involvement is not a part of the gospel message.

There is another controversial passage in Paul's writing that does not address the word repent, but does address the concept of repentance.

1 Thessalonians 1:6–9

6 And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: 7 So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. 9 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

As in the rest of the New Testament, the object of repentance is God, the Corinthians turned to God: the fact of the turning from idols is a consequence of that turn to God and not a cause of it. The word order

in this sentence is not accidental [It is the same in the KJV, NKJV, NASB and NIV] . One is saved by a single act, that of believing. Repentance is the turning to God that faith explicitly requires. For Israel, that turning was rich with meaning because the nation already possessed a relationship to God, by the Mosaic Covenant. In the case of the Gentiles, they were not returning again to a pre-existing relationship, but from a non-existent one. Although the Gentiles were often idolaters, Paul never made their attitude towards idolatry a condition of the terms of salvation.

Acts 17:29–31

29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. 30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: 31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

In this passage, idolatry is explicitly the subject of Paul's discourse. The Athenians are commanded to repent [v27-“That they should seek the Lord”], the object of which is “that man” raised from the dead, who will judge all men.

If those who attach a decision about sin to the gospel wish to be consistent, it would be helpful to define *how serious* one has to be about that decision. Apparently many believers evangelized *under this system* have repented of racial prejudice in order to be saved and immediately recanted this repentance upon receipt of the new birth. The same can be said for many other categories of sin. Furthermore, if repentance means to turn from *known* sin, it must be noted that the basis of condemnation is Adam's sin [Rom 5.18]. If repentance merely means to repent from the *principle* of sin, what then is that and where is it in scripture made a condition of salvation?

Mark 2:15–17 Repentance a Synonym for Faith

15 And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. 16 And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? 17 When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

This important passage, like Peter's statement in Acts 2.38 refers only to repentance as the mechanism of the new birth. In order to avoid absolute heresy, this use would have to include both the concepts of faith and turning from sin in order for the "repentance from sin and faith in Jesus" position to be reflected here. The issue here, of course, is not that the publicans were sinners and the Pharisees were not, but that the publicans and prostitutes recognized their sinful condition and the Pharisees did not. Only a person that recognizes their sinfulness can also see their need for a Savior. There is however, a large chasm between this acknowledgement, and making repentance from sins a condition of the new birth. Preaching that men are sinners in need of a Savior is always in order, but a line is crossed when what we think about our sins is made a condition of the gospel itself. However logically satisfying the connection may be to the mind of the preacher, it is not connected to the gospel in scripture and is thus a weakening condition affixed to the truth.

Indeed, Jesus is calling sinners to repentance today and the following are His terms according to the Apostle John:

The Gospel According to Jesus

The teaching of Jesus regarding the gospel is related exhaustively in the Gospel of John. By enumerating His statements there, we may also by implication see his position upon the meaning of repentance, a concept which He is recorded as using in the other Gospels. I will relate these passages mostly without comment.

John 3:14–18

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. 17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. 18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God

John 5:24

24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

John 5:46–47

46 For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. 47 But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?

John 6:35–36¹²

35 And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. 36 But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not.

John 6:40

40 And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:47

47 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

John 11:25–26

25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: 26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

John 12:44–46

44 Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. 45 And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. 46 I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

¹² There is one gospel in all dispensations, differing only in specificity

John 14:1

1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

John 16:8–9

8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9 Of sin, because they believe not on me;

John 16:27

27 For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

John 17:20

20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

John 20:29

29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

So we see that the testimony of the apostle John regarding the word repentance [which is none] is actually the doctrine of Jesus. Thus repentance where it is used in the gospels signifies turning to God and in this sense is a synonym for faith. It was therefore not necessary that John append the concept of repentance to His gospel.

Other References to Repentance in the Scriptures

Mark 6:12

And they went out, and preached that men should repent.

Here Jesus sent out the twelve to preach in the cities of Israel. The parallel passages are found in Matt. 10:7. Luke 10:9 where they are told simply to preach "the kingdom of heaven" and the "kingdom of God." So the synoptics see these three statements as being synonymous. Only those possessing eternal life could participate in an eternal kingdom, the requirement for this life was repentance which was synonymous with faith in the promised and now present Messiah.

Luke 13:3

I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

The alternative to repentance is to perish. Therefore repentance is a term which describes faith in Christ's work.

Luke 17:2–4

2 It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. 3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. 4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

Finally a verse in which repentance means to turn from ones sin. It has nothing to do with the new birth.

Luke 24:36–48

36 And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. 37 But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. 38 And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? 39 Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. 40 And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. 41 And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? 42 And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. 43 And he took it, and did eat before them. 44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. 45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, 46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, **and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:** 47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 And ye are witnesses of these things.

Conclusion

My reason for engaging in this study was that I wanted God to open my understanding regarding the subject of repentance and faith. I have always been uncomfortable about the definition of repentance that I heard in many gospel presentations. I have been angered by sermons proclaiming salvation by faith alone, then offering immediately thereafter two conditions for the new birth. I had been exasperated by the modifications made to passages such as Acts 16:31 and 1Cor 15:1; exceptionally clear statements that were manipulated to align them with this doctrine.

So I prayed for God to open my understanding. Was it possible that I was wrong regarding the gospel? Could I be mistaken about a doctrine which is at the foundation of every other save the doctrine of God itself? Either the gospel is by faith alone in the blood of Christ or it is by faith and repentance of sins. It is a clear misrepresentation to call two things one. I suspected that the simultaneous faith/repentance or "repentance is the flip side of faith" arguments could not be scripturally defended. Finally, it seemed that often the defense of this position relied more upon "hollering" and appeals to its antiquity than to scriptural evidence.

The passage above is the last one in this study [I have dealt with Paul's epistles and John's gospel earlier]. In it the resurrected Jesus again defines the gospel as his crucifixion [suffering] and resurrection. It is by faith in these truths alone that forgiveness is granted and eternal life received.

Appendix I: Repentance in the Dictionaries

There is little help to be found in bible dictionaries and lexicons regarding metanoia in the gospel context. For the most part, if these references are to be accepted, then repentance as they describe it would contradict the gospel altogether.

New International Dictionary of the New Testament

Hence, repentance is now no longer obedience to a law but to a person. The call to repentance becomes a call to discipleship. So repentance, faith and discipleship are different aspects of the same thing (Mk. 1:15, “Repent and believe”).

J. Goetzmann, “Μετάνοια,” ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 358.

Louw Nida Greek English Lexicon

41.52 μετανοέω; μετάνοια, ας f: to change one’s way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness—‘to repent, to change one’s way, repentance.’⁵

Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996.

Theological Lexicon of the New Testament

In the NT, *metanoieō* and *metanoia* (56 occurrences) retain this basic meaning, “change opinions, regret, be grieved about something,” but they are used almost exclusively for the attitude of unbelievers and sinners returning to God,¹⁹ and they are laden with a new theological density; they form an essential part of the kerygma lexicon, urging “conversion” to Christianity. There is no longer any question of distinguishing between change of thoughts, of heart, of actions.

Ceslas Spicq and James D. Ernest, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 475.

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament

(2) Jesus. In the teaching of Jesus *metanoieite* is the imperative that is implied in the indicative of the message of the kingdom. Conversion is a basic requirement that follows from the reality of the eschatological kingdom as it is present in Jesus’ person. The preaching and miracles are a call to conversion in a final and unconditional decision, in a once-for-all turning to God in total obedience (cf. Mk. 1:15; Mt. 12:39ff.; 11:20ff.; Mt. 4:17). This is the point of Jesus’ teaching even when the terms are not used. Not merely

evil, but anything that might be put before God must be renounced (Mt. 5:29–30; 10:32ff., etc.). Conversion applies to all people, demanding a complete commitment that seeks forgiveness in full trust and surrender. Faith is its positive aspect (cf. Mk. 1:15). It is not a human achievement, for it involves becoming small and receptive like a child (Mt. 18:3). It is God's gift, but as such a binding requirement. By the baptism of the Spirit Jesus imparts the divine power that creates those who are subject to the divine rule, i.e., converted people. In all its severity, then, the message is one of joy. *metánoia* is not law, but gospel.

Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 642–643.

The application of these concepts of repentance to the gospels would contradict the teaching of the scripture that salvation is on the basis of faith in the work of Christ, without the admixture of human works, be they physical, mental or emotional. The bible does not require a change in actions, or feelings in order for a person to be saved. The only human attitude crucial to salvation is one's attitude about Jesus and his saving work. Nor is salvation dependent upon a commitment to discipleship.

Charles Ryrie say it well:

“I do not need to believe in Christ's second coming in order to be saved. I do not need to receive Him as my present intercessor. But I do need to believe that He died for my sins and rose triumphant over sin and death. I do not need to settle issues that belong to Christian living in order to be saved. I do not need to pledge a portion of my future income in order to be saved. I do not need to be willing to give up smoking in order to be saved. Matters of carnality, spirituality, fruit-bearing and backsliding relate to the Christian life, not to the issue of salvation. Only the Lord Jesus, God who became man, could and did resolve that problem by dying for us.

Ryrie, Charles, *So Great Salvation, What it Means to Believe in Jesus Christ*, (Victor, Wheaton, 1989] pg. 40

While most appear willing to acknowledge that the classical Greek definition of *metanoia* refers to a change of mind, this definition becomes intertwined with other themes when applied to the New Testament. However, a few dictionaries retain this definition of the word.

Lexham Theological Wordbook

μετάνοια (*metanoia*). n. fem. change of mind, repentance. In the NT, primarily refers to a comprehensive change of one's orientation toward following God.

This is the noun equivalent of the verb μετανοέω (*metanoeō*) “to change one's mind.” Like the verb, it originally referred to a change of mind, but by the time of the NT it had taken on a meaning in Jewish thought of a return to God. In the Gospels, John the Baptist offers a “baptism of repentance (*metanoia*) for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4; Luke

3:3). Jesus similarly calls people to repentance (Luke 5:32) and tells his disciples to proclaim “repentance (metanoia) and forgiveness of sins” to all nations (Luke 24:47).

Lesley DiFransico, “Repentance,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., Lexham Theological Wordbook, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

Strong’s Lexicon

3341 μετάνοια [metanoia /met·an·oy·ah/] n f. From 3340; TDNT 4:975; TDNTA 636; GK 3567; 24 occurrences; AV translates as “repentance” 24 times. 1 a change of mind, as it appears to one who repents, of a purpose he has formed or of something he has done.

James Strong, Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon (Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1995).

If the bible is to have any objective meaning, the meaning of words must be able to be derived by their use in scripture. This does not negate the value of other extra-biblical uses and lexical considerations, far from it, but the application of theological words must be determined in the context of their usage by the original biblical authors. In the attempt to do this, our own theological inclinations influence our interpretations, but these impulses must be resisted in the interest of accuracy. A person that believes that repentance is: “to change one’s way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousnessⁱⁱ” must preach an entirely different gospel than that of Jesus who stated:

John 3:16–18 (KJV 1900)

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. 17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. 18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

i

1. Faith is the means, and repentance is the end. Faith leads to repentance, not repentance to faith. The Scriptures present God’s mercy in redemption as the motive to repentance: “Turn, O backsliding children, says the Lord; for I am married unto you” (Jer. 3:14); “turn unto the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful” (Joel 2:13).

2. Repentance involves turning to God; but there can be no turning but through Christ: “No man comes unto the Father but by me” (John 14:6); “I am the door” (10:9).

3. If repentance precedes faith, then it stands between the sinner and Christ. The sinner cannot go to Christ “just as he is,” but must first make certain that he has repented.

4. If repentance precedes faith, then none but the penitent man is invited to believe in Christ. This contradicts Rom. 5:6: “Christ died for the ungodly.” Impenitent sinners are commanded to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ in order to the remission of their sins.

5. The doctrine that repentance precedes faith tends to make repentance legal, that is, a reason why Christ should accept the sinner.

6. God out of Christ and irrespective of faith in Christ is a consuming fire (Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29). It is impossible to have godly sorrow with this view of God. Only remorse and terror are possible. In such passages as Mark 1:15 (“repent and believe the gospel”) and Acts 20:21 (“testifying repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ”) the end is mentioned first and the means last. In a proposition, a term may have a position

verbally which it has not logically. In Jer. 31:34 sanctification is mentioned before pardon: “They shall all know me, for I will forgive their iniquity.”²⁶

William Greenough Thayer Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2003), 791.

ⁱⁱ Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996.