



"Men have grown to accept excellence, not obedience, as their aim in life. To aim for obedience is to aim for perfection. Excellence allows room for a mixture."

—Steve Arterburn

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Repentance: The Genuine Article (Part Six)

John the Baptist is the first of God's messengers to address [repentance](#) in the New Testament:

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the [kingdom of heaven](#) is at hand! . . . Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance. . . . And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." ([Matthew 3:1-2](#), 8, 10)

John prepared the way for Christ's coming by preaching a message of repentance because, in order for righteousness to be developed in the people, they first had to repent. They could not accept Jesus' teachings until they had been convicted of their sins and turned from them. The proof, John says, that a person has truly made a change of heart and lifestyle appears when his life begins to show him doing what is right. Right living is the fruit of repentance.

If we think that we have repented but are still walking the old road leading to death, then we probably have not fully repented. If that is the case, we need to do so right away! As Peter writes in [1 Peter 4:17](#), judgment is on us now, and whoever fails to live

righteously—fails to show godly fruit—will be, in John the Baptist's words, "cut down and thrown into the fire." Stiff words, indeed, but necessary to motivate us toward the goal.

So, having gone through all of this, *how* do we repent? Have we ever considered that Jesus could not show us how to do it? Though He is our perfect example in how to live, He can never Himself show us how to repent because He never had a [sin](#) to repent of. To whom do we look as an example of true repentance?

Jesus left that job to "a man after His own heart" ([I Samuel 13:14](#)), His own ancestor, David, whose attitude was one of going on to perfection ([Hebrews 6:1](#)). [God](#) loved him so much because he had a heart that always tried to do what was right, and when he slipped and fell, being humble and teachable, he repented and moved forward.

Psalm 51 is David's well-known and well-loved Psalm of Repentance. We will observe only the highlights—twelve in all—that focus on the most critical aspects of genuine repentance:

First, David simply throws himself on God's mercy when he asks for forgiveness. He does not try to justify himself or explain away his sin. He pleads, "Do to me what You think is right, but please be merciful."

Second, he confesses his sins unequivocally—he admits that he did them—and does not attempt to hide himself or his sins from God.

Third, he acknowledges that his sins are against God, as all sin is. Every sin we commit affects our relationship with Him, since sin separates us from God ([Isaiah 59:2](#)). Thus, David acknowledges that he has wronged God primarily ([II Samuel 12:13](#)). Of course, he had hurt others in the process and caused the whole nation great distress, but of all these, God is by far the most important.

Fourth, David acknowledges that his entire nature is sinful, and that sin is a fact of human existence. However, he also accepts that God requires us to overcome it with His help.

Fifth, he recognizes that God and God alone can cleanse him of sin. By using the word "hyssop" ([Psalm 51:7](#); see [Exodus 12:22](#)), He hints that only the sacrifice of [Jesus Christ](#), the Lamb of God, can remit our sins and make the passing over of our sins possible. Only by washing in the blood of the Lamb of God can we be whiter than snow.

Sixth, he asks God to change his heart and to grant him true repentance. Paul teaches

in [Romans 2:4](#), ". . . the [goodness](#) of God leads you to repentance," and in [II Timothy 2:25](#), "God perhaps will grant them repentance." Because we have a part to play in it too, repentance is a cooperative act with God to change our hearts.

Seventh, he appeals to God to renew His [Holy Spirit](#) in him. He begs, "Please, do not take it away from me! Please do not cast me away from your Presence. Help me to overcome this by Your power because by my own strength I can do nothing."

Eighth, by saying, "Restore to me the [joy](#) of Your salvation," he asks God to return him to the path toward His Kingdom. He had discovered that the way of sin leading to condemnation and death was a dark, dreary, hopeless road. He needed God to set his feet on the right path again.

Ninth, he requests that God help him to become a good example to others and to teach them His way of life. He wanted, not only to repent of this sin, but also to pursue righteousness to the point that others could follow his example and learn from him. No half-measures for David!

Tenth, he praises God for His goodness and mercy. Showing Him our sincere gratitude for His grace and forbearance does wonders for our attitude, as it acknowledges our reliance on Him.

Eleventh, David lets God know that he understands that no physical act will ever atone for his sins. He can do nothing—no amount of sacrifice—to make up for them. What God desires is a change of heart and mind, asking for a humble spirit that will transform one's way of life. He respects the person who is submissive and willing to change.

Finally, he asks God to show favor to Zion—in our case, the church, the people of God—implying, "Please do not let my sin cause others harm or bring dishonor to You or Your people. Please intervene so that the effects of my sin do not ripple out to affect others—in fact, turn this to good." With the assurance that God has covered our sins, our sacrifices and acts of righteousness and love toward God and man can have real meaning and produce pleasing fruit.

Paul writes in [Romans 6:22-23](#): "But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Consider the slavery and redemption of the Israelites. Like them, we have been redeemed from Egypt, a type of [the world](#). Also like them, the ungodly things that we

learned during our enslavement remain in our minds. God does not just make all those habits, attitudes, and inclinations disappear. Certainly, He has cleansed us from our sins, but we are always in need of repentance. We must still turn off the dusty, crowded highway that leads to death and walk the sunlit path to eternal life in God's Kingdom.

Doing this takes time and a great deal of hard work, but it all begins with deep, earnest repentance—a thorough conversion of mind and attitude and a change in conduct to what is right and godly. Then and only then will we truly be preparing for the Kingdom of God.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Healing the Breach](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Richard Ritenbaugh, using the military metaphor of the Forlorn Hope (Dutch verloren hoop ' "Lost Band") suggests that Jesus Christ, through His bloody death has breached the enemy walls, rending the veil and opening up access to God the Father. We, as part of the firstfruits, have been called as an elite unit to work with Christ to help heal or repair the breach caused by numerous ruptured covenants between God and man for all mankind forever. Sin automatically causes God to react, bringing about an immediate breach and causing fear, shame, guilt, scattering, separation, loss of identity, and death. We begin to repair the breach by using God's Holy Spirit (Christ's mind) to displace the sins in ourselves and practice righteous judgment.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Time for Self-Evaluation](#)

by John O. Reid (1930-2016)

Prior to the Days of Unleavened Bread, we are told to examine ourselves. How can we do that? John Reid gives a few pointers on doing a thorough, honest once over.

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