



"The law sends us to the gospel, that we may be justified, and the gospel sends us to the law to frame our way of life."

—Samuel Bolton

01-Apr-16

What Is Repentance? (Part Two)

As we saw in Part One, the biblical words translated as "[repentance](#)" indicate a thorough moral adjustment of an individual's thoughts, words, and deeds. While the word itself focuses on the change in heart and behavior, what is actually being repented of is [sin](#), the reason repentance is necessary in the first place. Recall that John the Baptist preached repentance for the remission of sin ([Mark 1:4](#); [Luke 3:3](#)). [Jesus Christ](#) said He came to call sinners to repentance so they would stop being sinners ([Matthew 9:13](#); [Mark 2:17](#); [Luke 5:32](#)). To understand repentance, then, we must understand what sin is, since sin is the behavior that we need to turn from when we repent.

[John 3:4](#) provides the Bible's basic definition of sin: "Everyone who commits sin breaks God's law, for that is what sin is, by definition—a breaking of God's law" (J.B. Phillips' Translation). Simply put, sin is acting contrary to the way that [God](#) says to act, as contained in His law.

So, when John and Jesus came preaching repentance, they were telling their audiences to turn from breaking God's law—to stop doing those deeds that God's law defines as sin. When Paul told the men of Athens that God "now commands all men everywhere to repent" ([Acts 17:30](#)), he was saying that it is incumbent on all people to turn from breaking God's law. When he declared on all of his journeys that both Jews and Gentiles should repent, turn to God, and then do works befitting that repentance, he was clearly upholding the [law of God](#) as the basic standard of Christian conduct. The works he spoke of are deeds that are in alignment with God's law rather than opposed to it. In short, everywhere Paul went, he told people to stop sinning, turn to God, and lead lives that exhibited their earnest desire to follow God and conform to His law (see [Acts 20:21](#); [26:20](#)).

Mainstream Protestantism generally holds that God's law has been done away through Christ's death. However, if His law has been abolished, then sin itself has been "done away"! [Romans 3:20](#) teaches that "by the law is the knowledge of sin," and [Romans 4:15](#) says that "where there is no law there is no transgression." Yet, the New Testament writers have a great deal to say about the presence of sin, demonstrating that a law still exists and it is being broken.

Even more confounding to Protestantism is following its own assertion to its conclusion: If there is no law, then there is no sin, and if there is no sin, then there is no need for a Savior! Though they may not say it outright, false ministers who claim Jesus did away with His own law are really implying that we do not need to be saved from anything, making the role of Savior obsolete for the past 2,000 years!

The only reason a man would need to accept Christ as Savior is if he needed to be saved from something—something like sin, which the Bible plainly asserts is defined by God's law. In that brand of Protestantism, repentance is a hazy and undefined idea because its adherents hold God's law in such low esteem. Hundreds of millions of professing Christians claim to have repented and received forgiveness, yet each week they continue, for instance, to break the [fourth commandment](#) with rarely a second thought. So much for doing works worthy of repentance! If they had truly repented, they would have changed so that they would not continue to break the [Sabbath](#) so cavalierly.

Because Christians must contend with the reality of sin on an ongoing basis (see [Romans 7:23](#)), repentance is not limited to our initial conversion but is also an ongoing activity. Notice what Jesus teaches in the model prayer:

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. ([Matthew 6:11-15](#))

Notice that He gives this as an example of *daily* prayer: "Give us *this day* our *daily* bread" (verse 11). Immediately on the heels of this daily request is a request for forgiveness, which is just another way to describe the process of repentance. Jesus is not talking about forgiveness of a monetary debt, but the forgiveness of the life-debt that we incur when we break God's law, "for the wages of sin is death" ([Romans 6:23](#)). In verses 14-15, our Savior uses the word "trespasses," but a trespass is simply another term for a sin. The ongoing forgiveness of our sins, therefore, depends on our ongoing forgiveness of the sins against us. And do not forget that Christ includes all of this within His pattern of *daily* prayer.

Anytime we sin, then, we must repent. Anytime we become aware that we have transgressed God's law, we have to turn from that sin, seek God's forgiveness, and begin doing the opposite—the works that are in alignment with God and His instructions. It is a basic Christian principle, but we can begin to see how often it must be applied when we broaden our understanding of sin.

Part Three will explore, not just this broader view of what it means to violate God's law, but also how serious the Head of the church is when He commands the end-time churches to repent.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Loving God's Law: The Thread of Reality](#)

by David F. Maas

The metaphor of a fence providing navigation through the storm could be applied to God's Holy Law - the Torah, referring not only to the Pentateuch or the Ten Commandments, but to the entire instruction and counsel of God, which Psalm 119 alternately refers to as God's precepts, statutes, commandments, judgments, ordinances, testimonies, and words. God the Father considered His Holy and Spiritual Law so important that He sent His Son to pay for the penalties we have accrued against it, giving us also a model as to how to keep the Law, giving us His Holy Spirit, thereby providing us with the power to keep it in the letter (showing us the boundaries and the safe zones) and the Spirit, (leading to spiritual growth and the development of godly character.) As God's Holy Spirit (which the late Herbert W. Armstrong referred to as God's Holy Law in action) displaces our carnality, we receive and develop the DNA of our new, emergent spiritual bodies.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Are the Sabbath and Holy Days Done Away?](#)

by Earl L. Henn (1934-1997)

In order to justify not keeping the Sabbath, many use Colossians 2:16-17 as proof that Paul did not command it. Earl Henn exposes this conclusion as pure fiction!

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).
