



A Doctrine of Repentance

by Ronald L. Dart

I have a feeling that if we were to sit down and make a list of what we consider the foundational doctrines of Christ—the basic doctrines of Christianity—that our list would be *surprisingly* different from the list that we would find in the Bible—a list that actually does exist, in fact. The funny thing about this is that...I think what has happened is that, at any given point in history, the things that we are going to emphasize regarding doctrine will change. What will be different to us or important to us about doctrine will seem more significant now and might not have seemed so significant 500 years ago. I know that in the modern world we have laid a *great* deal of emphasis on certain doctrines because they are *distinct from* the rest of the religious establishment around us, in our country and where we work primarily. And, as a result of it, you naturally tend to look for those things that make you distinct from others (and I've addressed that before). But unfortunately, I'm afraid in some cases we're putting up studs in the wall and rafters and ceiling joists when we have not even yet poured the foundation, and may not have the grasp of the foundational doctrines of Jesus Christ that we really ought to have. What are they?

Well, the writer of Hebrews really gives us a clue on this. In Hebrew chapter five and verse 12, he writes of this. Hebrews tends to read like a treatise in much of its parts; like just a paper someone wrote—a theological paper. But it's not. It's a letter. And it's written to people who have a frame of mind and a personal reference. Because he writes to them that:

Hebrews 5

AKJV

¹² For when for the time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; [...]

Now, here's a church that he felt *should* have been mature and should have been going on to bigger and better things, but because they weren't he said we're going to have to go back and lay the groundwork, I guess, all over again.

Hebrews 5

AKJV

¹² [...] and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

Now, it's intriguing, when you read the Book of Hebrews, to see what Paul considers to be milk, or what he considers to be foundational. There are many times things that you and I might have thought were really esoteric doctrines, strong meat—things that were *way out there* that we would learn way down the road. Well, Paul, on the other hand, seems to think these are foundational. But he says:

Hebrews 5

AKJV

¹³ For every one that uses milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

¹⁴ But strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

There are some interesting things in that. One is that there's such a thing for a Christian as coming of age—of maturing. Second is that the development of your understanding and your sense comes about by *reason of use*—in other words, experience. You have to actually work at these things if you're going to make progress in the understanding of God and the understanding of God's word. That's not hard to get. And they have “exercised” their senses to the discernment of both good and evil. Then he says this:

Hebrews 6

AKJV

¹ Therefore leaving [*Not “abandoning”. He doesn't mean that.*] the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on to perfection; not laying again [*or the Greek (kataballó, καταβάλλω, Strong's G2598), I think, is “casting down”*] the foundation of [...]

And then he lists six basic doctrines.

Hebrews 6

AKJV

¹ [...] not laying again the foundation of [*1*] repentance from dead works, and of [*2*] faith toward God,

² Of the doctrine of [*3*] baptisms, and of [*4*] laying on of hands, and of [*5*] resurrection of the dead, and of [*6*] eternal judgment.

Now, that's a very interesting list. I remember when I took over my very first pastorate. The minister who had helped me get started, as he left, said, “I want you to do a series of sermons on the six doctrines of Hebrews 6—the foundational doctrines of the church.” I said, “Oh, I should think a person should be able to cover those in one sermon.” He said, “Yeah, that's what *you* think.” And his instructions were to do a separate sermon on *each* of the seven doctrines. I thought, “Well, probably I could do one on baptism and laying on of hands. That would be one.” He said, “Nope. You're going to be surprised when you do your research on it, to study it. Give a separate sermon on each of the seven doctrines.” (I'm sorry, there were only six. I know there are only six, but Paul was not counting. Otherwise, I'm sure he would have found one more and made the seven that we usually require in this sort of thing.)

Well now, the very first doctrine that Paul lists in this is *repentance*. Repentance, then, is the first of the foundational doctrines of Christ. I don't know if you realize this or not, but it is also the first word in the Gospel—the very first word of the Gospel. Because in Matthew 4, and verse seventeen:

Matthew 4

AKJV

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

The very first word, then, that he uttered as a part of his preaching or his sermons (according to Matthew) was the word “repent”. Well, what exactly, then, *is* the doctrine of repentance. Here's what the *Scofield Reference Bible* says about it. Now, this is interesting to me because *Scofield* is a Protestant resource, and this is the way they outline the meaning of the doctrine of repentance.

“Repent” is a translation of a Greek word *metanoēō* [Strong’s G3340], meaning *to have another mind, to change the mind*, and is used in the N.T. to indicate a change of mind in respect to sin, God, and self. This change of mind may, especially in the case of Christians who have fallen into sin, be preceded by sorrow (2Co. 7:8–11); but sorrow for sin, though it may cause repentance, is not repentance. The son in [the parable of] Mt. 21:28–29 illustrates true repentance.

[And we’ll come to that in a moment.]

Repentance is not an act separate from faith, but saving faith includes and implies that change of mind which is called repentance[....]

Scofield Reference Bible - Repentance, Summary

Now, I thought that was really fascinating, because I can’t really find a thing in that that I disagree with. I don’t find anything. One of the most interesting aspects of it is that he makes the point that repentance is not an act separate from faith, but that what he calls “saving faith includes and implies that change of mind which is called repentance”. You know, it’s funny to me, because I have listened to in my time—I have read and heard and what have you—numerous debates and discussions about the differences between law and grace, about the role of the law in the life of a Christian, and how:

Ephesians 2

AKJV

⁸ For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast.

And the Baptists and others will quote that scripture again and again and again. And when you begin to discuss with them questions like the Sabbath and the Holy Days, the argument begins to somehow come around to the idea, and the emphasis begins to shift, to where it is “faith alone, faith alone”, or as someone said, “Christ plus nothing”, is what’s required for salvation. And yet, when you come right down to it, in a fundamental Protestant explanation of this, he says this:

Repentance is not an act separate from faith, but saving faith includes [...] repentance[....]

Scofield Reference Bible - Repentance, Summary

What does that mean? Repentance means that you change your mind about sin and about God and you try to *turn your life around*. In other words, something is *expected* of you. It’s a nice cliché, a good sound-bite, to say, “Oh, Christ plus nothing! Faith alone!”, and all these things. But *in* that—when they say “faith alone”—they *include* in faith the act of repentance, and that sometimes doesn’t make it into the discussion, and doesn’t find an adequate expression.

Now, the first reference that Scofield made in this is the one from Second Corinthians 7, and beginning in verse eight. He said, “this change of mind may, especially in the case of Christians who have fallen into sin, be preceded by sorrow”. Now, the reference starts out this way. Paul writes to the Corinthians in Second Corinthians and says:

2 Corinthians 7

AKJV

⁸ For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: [...]

In other words...I guess he means, “I felt bad about it after I wrote it, but I’ve got to come around and say, ‘No, I’m *not* sorry that I wrote you that letter.’” The letter in question is First Corinthians, and the passage in First Corinthians in question is First Corinthians 5, where he calls them down for allowing this man (who is having sexual relationships with his step-mother, apparently) and allowing him to continue to attend church, just as though there were nothing wrong in the man’s life. And he says, “No sir, it’s time to deal with that. You actually turn this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh”, Paul said. So he rebuked them soundly for that. This is a reference to that. He says:

2 Corinthians 7

AKJV

⁸ For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same letter has made you sorry, though it were but for a season.

⁹ Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that you sorrowed to repentance: [...]

Now, what are we talking about? Well, being *sorry* about something or *feeling sorry* is not repentance. Actually, sorrow may *lead* you to repentance. What’s repentance? It’s a change of heart and mind. It’s a turn around in the way you live your life. It actually means you really, from the heart, change.

2 Corinthians 7

AKJV

⁹ [...] for you were made sorry after a godly manner, that you might receive damage by us in nothing.

¹⁰ For godly sorrow works repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world works death.

What’s the difference between the two: Godly sorrow and the sorrow of the world? Probably, the most obvious example of the sorrow of the world is somebody who is just sorry he got caught. He’s miserable. He’s sorry. He sheds copious tears. But the tears and the misery and all the stuff that goes with it are merely because he got caught. And he’s sorry for what is happening to him right now. He’s sorry for the tragedy that struck his life. All these things. But, somewhere in all of this, there is not the sorrow toward God—that he has offended God, that he has thrown mud in the face of God (if that were possible; figuratively speaking, of course), that he has brought *shame* upon God and upon all of God’s people (which this man here had done). And what he’s talking about is that “godly sorrow”, or a sorrow toward God that leads to a change of life. Worldly sorrow—“I’m sorry I got caught.”—what it really means is, “I will be more careful about getting caught next time.”

2 Corinthians 7

KJ2000

¹¹ For behold this same thing, that you sorrowed after a godly sort [*Look at this.*], what earnestness it worked in you [*You were much more careful about things.*], yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what full punishment! In all things you have proved yourselves to be pure in this matter.

Notice: Repentance on the part of the church (We’re not talking about the man, for his repentance is discussed elsewhere in Second Corinthians.) Their repentance involved a whole *range* of actions and emotions. They felt it to the core, and they began to do a lot of things to begin to put things right. That’s what repentant people do—that is, people who have godly sorrow that leads to repentance.

Now, his second reference in this is that he says, “sorrow for sin, though it may cause repentance, is not repentance”, and this is illustrated in a parable that Jesus gave in Matthew 21, and we’ll begin in verse 28. Jesus said:

Matthew 21

AKJV

²⁸ But what think you? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard.

²⁹ He answered and said, I will not [*Oh, no. I'm not going out there.*]: but afterward he repented, and went.

He actually was sorry for what he had said (for his attitude or what have you) and he put it right. How did he put it right? He did what he was told. He went out and did it.

Matthew 21

AKJV

³⁰ And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not.

So words don't mean very much. "I'm sorry", doesn't cut it. What actually cuts it is what you *do* as a result of the sorrow that you've got. That's where repentance begins to come into the thing. Jesus said:

Matthew 21

KJ2000

³¹ Which of the two did the will of his father? They said unto him, The first. Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

Now, this was said to a lot of *very* religious people. They were people who professed righteousness. They were people who could go up to the Temple and pray and say, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people", and list off all of their righteous acts and compare themselves to a publican or a sinner over here and say, "I'm not like that man." Jesus said these people who were religious would *not* go into the Kingdom of Heaven—that the publicans and the harlots, the street-walkers, would actually go into the Kingdom first. Why was that? Well, because when the publican or the street-walker comes face to face with real righteousness—when they really come into the presence of God—these people are going to hate themselves because *they know what they are*. The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the leaders of the religious establishment *didn't know* what they were in God's sight. He said:

Matthew 21

AKJV

³² For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and you, when you had seen it, repented not afterward, that you might believe him.

"He came to you and he preached and you wouldn't believe him. The publicans and harlots heard the preaching of a righteous man and were *cut* to the heart, were *convicted* of sin. They were *sorry* for what they were, and they began to turn their lives around. And when you saw all this you would *not* repent, and you would *not* believe John." For I believe that John had some references that he made to *those* people as well as he did to the publicans and harlots.

Now, what is repentance like? What is the experience of repentance like? How does it actually proceed in the life of a human being? Frankly, in people who believe in their own righteousness, it doesn't work very well at all. It hardly ever shows up. The fact of the matter is that, as long as your life is working, as long as everything is clicking right along with good rhythm, as long as you're making good money, as long as you're making your house payments, as long as your children are healthy, and your wife is

healthy, and everything in your life is working, repentance—that is, turning toward God—is not really a part of the process. It’s only when the life begins to go wrong—only when you begin to be *convicted* of the fact that you have made some mistakes and some wrong turns and that you have been a sinner—do you ever begin to really make the changes that need to be made.

Now, there’s a good illustration in the Bible of this for a *righteous* man—a man who God said lived out his life... who hated evil, turned his back on sin, was righteous and upstanding, and more so than any other man on the face of the earth. And his name was Job. Now, you’re familiar with the story of Job—how Satan challenged God [**Job 1**] about him and said, “Well, good grief, this man... why shouldn’t he serve you? Does he serve you for nothing? I mean, it *pays* Job to serve you. You put out your hand upon him and he’ll curse you to your face.” And God said, “Okay, I’ll tell you what; we’ll see what happens. I will allow you to challenge Job’s faith and his belief system and how he thinks about things.” Then proceeds the *very long* Book of Job, with lengthy speeches that is very hard to... it’s very difficult to read through the Book of Job and keep the thread and really stay clear in your mind about what’s going on in the Book of Job.

But as you get down toward the end, there are really two very powerful speeches: one by a man named Elihu (who was the youngest of Job’s friends, who basically brushed them all aside and told the truth in many ways) and then there was a speech made by God to Job. It was the speech that says:

Job 38

AKJV

⁴ Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? [...]

As human beings go, Job was a good man. But human beings don’t go very far, and that was where the problem came in. But through the process of the speech that God gave to Job (which is really worth a careful read sometime, when you’re alone and by yourself, and maybe try to put yourself in his shoes) ... as you listen to what God says to Job, you begin to be aware of the *greatness* of God, and the *feebleness* of man, and how every man at his best state is altogether vanity, and how all our righteousness is nothing but filthy rags before God.

You know, it is funny that you can think that you are fairly well-dressed and then you could show up at an event where there are people who are dressed completely formally—really dressed to the nines, sharp-looking people. And you go in there having felt you were well-dressed and all of a sudden begin to realize, “Well, I really should’ve put on my better pair of shoes. I really should have pressed my suit. Possibly, I should have gone down and rented a tuxedo, because I’m really beginning to look out of place here.” Can you imagine how you would feel coming into the presence of God? That nothing you would wear would be good enough. No expression on your face would be adequate. No posture you could move into would be meaningful (except flat on your face on the floor, perhaps).

Job’s biggest confrontation in all of this was the *awareness* of the righteousness of God, and all of his righteousness that he had done just didn’t seem very important to him. Listen to what Job said when he replied to God in Job 42, in verse one:

Job 42

AKJV

¹ Then Job answered the LORD, and said,

² I know that you can do every thing, and that no thought can be withheld from you.

³ Who is he that hides counsel without knowledge? [...]

“Who do I think I am that I have been spouting off about things that I don’t even begin to understand?”

Job 42

AKJV

³ [...] therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.

“I’ve acted like I had knowledge, I have acted like I was something special, and all of a sudden I come to realize I am not.”

Job 42

AKJV

⁴ Hear, I beseech you, and I will speak: I will demand of you, and declare you to me.

⁵ I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear: but now my eye sees you.

I think you and I are still very much in the first part of that equation (and haven’t really gone an awful long ways down that). We have heard about God by the hearing of the year. We’ve read about him in the pages of the Bible by the writings of people who have encountered God. And we have a lot of second-hand knowledge about God, and a lot of very incomplete knowledge about God. Job said, “I have heard it. Now my eye sees you.”

Job 42

KJ2000

⁶ Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

You know, I’ve heard some stuff about this particular verse in the modern world, because the gospel of self-esteem has become so powerful everywhere nowadays that you don’t want to try to lead people to think that they should come to abhor or despise *themselves*. And so there’s a certain amount of dancing around this particular passage of Scripture. Because I’ve heard a great deal of this, I went back and I tried to grasp the meaning of the scripture. And, I’m sorry, what it means is this: that when Job had come to a full realization of the glory of God, he actually *hated* himself, he *despised* himself. He looked upon himself as something *despicable*, something *worthy* of scorn, and *worthy* of shame. And we’re not talking about a man who says, “Mistakes were made.” (Which is the modern political catchphrase.) No, no. And he didn’t even say, “I have made mistakes.” He said, “*I despise my self*, and I repent in dust and ashes.”

Now, you should know that the despising of one’s self is not repentance. Hating yourself is not repentance. *Loathing* yourself, *abhorring* yourself is not repentance. For there are many, many people in the world who *wallow* in self-loathing, self-pity, self-hatred, and they do not repent, and they don’t change their lives. The despising of oneself is not repentance; but despising of one’s self that *leads* to repentance is like godly sorrow if it causes you to change—if it causes you to change those things about you that you have done that make you despicable; if it causes you to bring those things in your past life that are *worthy* of scorn, *worthy* of shame, *worthy* to be despised, *worthy* to be loathed and hated; and you bring these things to the feet of Jesus, and his blood covers *all* of those sins, and does away with *all* of your guilt, and allows you to come into the presence of God *without* shame. That’s what we’re talking about, about the process—the process of self-loathing or self-despising that leads you to begin to change your life and to make changes in your attitude toward God, to make changes in the way you live relative to sin and relative to God’s Law, that lead you to change your attitude. This is what repentance is all about.

What is repentance like? It’s like Job who, even though he was a good man, wasn’t anywhere near good enough and finally had to come to realize it. The men that Jesus came into contact with day-in and day-out in the religious establishment in Jerusalem were man a lot like Job would have been prior to him really coming to himself and coming to see himself. They fasted twice a week. They gave tithes of all

they possessed. They kept the Sabbath, kept the Holy Days. They would not even eat out of a bowl that at any time had touched unclean flesh. They would not eat food that had been cooked on a grill that had unclean flesh cooked on it (much less to have eaten the unclean flesh themselves). They wouldn't eat anything of an animal that died of itself. You know, the list of things that these men would not do, and of their ceremonial observance of the Law of God...the list just was long and long. And they were so careful about that they built a "fence" around the Law (to use their term). They started observing the Sabbath day a half-hour *before* the sun went down and they kept observing until a half-hour *after* the sun went down. These are people who were *careful* about the Law of God—just like Job was careful about the Law of God. And they believed in God, and tried to serve God, but there were still some real gaping holes.

In fact, these men would not have really quite been able to reach Job's shoe-latches when you come right down to it. For I do not think you would have ever found Job taking advantage of a widow. I don't think you would have ever found Job perverting judgment. I don't think you would have ever had Job denying someone their rights. In fact, that's what the whole long discussion in the Book of Job is all about: "I haven't done that. I haven't done this." And all of his friends thought, "You *have* to have done something wrong or this couldn't have happened to you." And their whole focus was on "What have you done?" And that wasn't the problem. The problem was that Job did not come to realize, and had not even grasped the beginning of the fact, that Man, at his best state, is altogether vanity and a striving after wind. There's just nothing to Man. And it's a comparison to God that made the difference.

What is repentance like? Well, in Job's case, it was a matter of the righteous man who really had not seen God and really had not seen himself. But there's another man; his name is David. David was the most powerful man in Jerusalem. Whatever he wanted, he could have. He had wives (in the plural). And if that had not been enough, he could have had *more*, and could have had more without censure. His son Solomon had how many women? Didn't it number close to *1,000* women? I think it was 300 wives and 700 concubines, or something like that, that Solomon had. I don't know how he managed to keep up with all that, but he did.

So David had wives, and he could have more wives, and he could have had concubines. But no. David walked out on the roof of his palace one night and saw a woman bathing. And he wanted her, and he took her, and she was *another man's wife*. Not only did he take her, he made her pregnant. And when he found out she was pregnant, he tried to deceive her husband into thinking that it was his baby. And when her husband wouldn't go down to his wife [while the rest of the army was camped in the fields] (because he was an honorable man), he sent him back into the battle and arranged to have the man killed. He became a liar, a murderer (as well as an adulterer). David did all these things, took then Bathsheba to be *his* wife (to make an honest woman out of her, as the saying might go), and she had that baby in *his* household [2 Samuel 11].

And one night, Nathan came in to David as his custom was, and he told him a story about a man who had the little ewe lamb. David listened to the story about a man who had whole herds of lamb—every manner of beast that he could possibly have, had all he could possibly want. And he saw the lamb that belonged to another man; he went and *took* it away from the man. Now, this little lamb slept with guy's children. It was a pet of the family. And he took that lamb, and he brought it in, and he killed that lamb and ate it. What would you do to that man? David was *furious*—absolutely beside himself. And he said, "Get that man! Let's bring him in here. We're going to punish that man. He should *die* for that." And Nathan looked him straight in the eye and said, "*You're* the man. *You're* the man. You have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite and have caused him to be killed." [2 Samuel 12]

This is the moment of the *conviction of sin*—the moment when even a person who knows who God is, even a person who tries in his way and most of his life to serve God, comes *slam up* against the truth about himself and the realization that he is a sinner—that he has committed...not merely just committed a sin, but has committed a *grievous* sin before God.

What is repentance like? Well, for some men, they are sorry they got caught. They are sorry they are found out. They were sorry the baby was going to be born. They were sorry they were being embarrassed. They were sorry because of the shame they brought on the nation. They were sorry because of a lot of things. That's the kind of *carnal* sorrow that one would find in many cases. David, who was not what I would call (I don't think what *anybody* would really call) a *righteous* man, did not respond this way. He responded to Nathan immediately by saying, "I have sinned." He didn't make any *justification*. He didn't *explain* his sin. He didn't *complain* about his existing wives. He didn't give *any* excuses whatsoever. He said, "I was wrong. I have sinned." Nathan said, "God has put away your sin. But the child is going to die."

David went away, and during this period of time he composed a psalm. And it is a psalm that comes from the soul...the *tortured* soul of a tortured man who has really come to see himself. And I think that psalm is one that all of us would do well to take to our closets sometime, and open before us, and pray before God and ask God to help us to find our way to the kind of spirit and that kind of attitude and the *depth of repentance* that this man exemplifies in this psalm. For whatever else one may think about the Bible, when you read something like this you *know* that the man who wrote it experienced it. You know this is not something that some monk living in a cloistered abbey somewhere, who never had experienced anything at all like this...a person like that could not write this. A female mystery writer who graduated from the University of Oxford, who sat around making her living writing poetry...no, no, I'm sorry. They can't write this. The person who writes this has to first *live it*.

It's the 51st psalm. And David starts out with the primary word, the most important word, the core of the of the idea: Mercy.

Psalm 51

AKJV

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, [...]

Mercy is that quality of withholding punishment even when the punishment is *perfectly* well due and richly deserved. Mercy just simply does not require of a person what the law would normally require. David does not ask for justification. He doesn't ask for God to make what he did the right thing. He says, "No, no":

Psalm 51

AKJV

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving kindness: according to the multitude of your tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

Now, I don't know for sure if David made the connection, but the word "blot out" or "blotting out" [*machah*, מָחָה, Strong's H4229] comes up from time to time in relationship to sin. And it harkens back to a very, very old ceremony that took place in the Tabernacle when a woman was accused by her husband of having had an affair. It's called the Trial of Jealousy [**Numbers 5**] and the woman is brought into the Temple and made to sit down. And the priest writes her sin down in a book. He then takes dust off of the floor of the Tabernacle—just good old, ordinary household dust—and he puts it in water and stirs it up. And he makes her to drink of the water. (It's called water that was made bitter.) And he takes some of that water and he *blots out* what he just wrote in the book, in terms of her sin. That's where the expression "blot out" (as it's used here and as Paul uses it one of his epistles, I think) comes from—is the blotting out of the written record of someone's sin in the book. The idea of the trial was that, if the woman were guilty, then he says her belly would swell, her thigh would rot. In other words, there would be a physical manifestation of her guilt from drinking water which would *otherwise* be completely harmless. And if she was innocent, nothing would happen.

Now, what happened? Well, I doubt there was ever a woman (unless God actually stepped in and did a *miracle*) that that happened to. In fact, I think probably in most cases the husband didn't even bother putting the wife in there on the Trial of Jealousy. I think the way it was done was intended to *inhibit* that kind of false accusation...and *foolish* accusation.

David said, "I want you to blot out my transgression." And the idea is that the sin, the iniquity, and the transgression...once blotted out, there would *be no record of it*. It would not be on the books that you did it and were pardoned, on the books and you served your time or were paroled; it's blotted out. It's not on the books and on your record *at all*—which is a rather large accomplishment.

Psalm 51

AKJV

- ¹ [...] according to the multitude of your tender mercies blot out my transgressions.
- ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.
- ³ For I acknowledge my transgressions: [...]

There is not to be found *anywhere* in this entire passage an excuse. There is not to be found one *word* of self-justification—not even the *beginning* of a word that had to be crossed out. David just simply took it all. He says:

Psalm 51

AKJV

- ³ For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

I know what that feels like. I think I can understand that. Because when you close your eyes, it's there. When you lie down at night to go to sleep, it's there. When you wake up in the middle of the night, it's there. When you wake up in the morning, it's there. When you eat breakfast, it's there. When you go to work, it's there. When you have lunch, it's there. "My sin is ever before me and *I want to be rid of it*. I want it to go away. I want you to blot it out...according to your mercy." And you know how that happens? It happens by honest confession. I acknowledge my transgressions, and with a total absence of any kind of justification. You don't explain it away. You don't ameliorate it. You don't in any way try to make it less than it is. In fact, David almost seems to me to rub it into himself, as it were. He said:

Psalm 51

AKJV

- ³ [...] my sin is ever before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight: that you might be justified when you speak, and be clear when you judge.
- ⁵ Behold, I was shaped in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

I don't think he means to be insulting his mother. I think what he is doing is using a metaphor, a figure of speech, to say, "I mean...it's sin in me. I'm sin all the way through! This is not a veneer." So oftentimes when people get caught in something bad they say, "Look, I don't want you to think this is the kind of person I am. This is not really me. I'm not really like that." David said, "I *am* really like that. This is me. I was that way from the beginning. It goes back so far it must go back as far as my mother's conceiving me. From the time I was in the womb I was a dirty, rotten sinner. I was shaped in iniquity." Now he says:

Psalm 51

AKJV

- ⁶ Behold, you desire truth in the inward parts: [...]

And the one thing that I know (and I know it just as much as I know that I'm standing here before you today) that is required for a person to have their sins put away is *truth*. Just good old, honest, bedrock truth—confession of who you are, what you've done, and what you deserve. No justification and no lying. The truth is that the first person we lie to is ourselves. You know, when you're worried about something you've done—and you're worried about something in your life that has happened and you wish you hadn't done, and now you're afraid the thing is going to catch up to you—one of the ways in which your sin stays before you is in all the hours you figure out trying to explain to yourself why you did it, and why it wasn't as bad as it might be (or as other people are ultimately going to think that it was) and what kind of an excuse you're going to give to the prosecuting attorney, what kind of explanation you're going to offer to your wife or to your husband for the weakness that you have. "How am I going to explain this thing to my children?" And you're sitting there all the time *rewriting* the story and *rewriting* your motives and *explaining* the reasons why you did all these things. This is not truth. This is a process of self-deception that sometimes enables people, whenever things come around, to tell a story about what they have done and to explain what they have done in a way that is completely deceitful and amounts to nothing better than a lie. And when they tell the story, they tell it with conviction, because they have told it so many times to themselves—in all of its hundreds of revisions in the wee, small hours of the nights. But for repentance to take place, all of the excuses and explanations need to be just simply swept away. God wants truth in the inward part, and he says:

Psalm 51

AKJV

⁶ [...] and in the hidden part you shall make me to know wisdom.

⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

In the Navy, at boot camp, we had a little custom. When we all went out for inspection every day... We all got inspected. We had to, actually, reach up on command to our hat and our t-shirt. And when the command was given, we had to roll off the white cap and roll out the white t-shirt. And the inspector would come by. And if he saw *one smidgen* of body dirt or body dinginess on that t-shirt or that cap, it was a demerit for the whole company. And the benefits, the privileges, granted to the *whole* company depended upon every single man in that company being *absolutely clean*. So guess what happened when old, dirty Charlie got us about five demerits on five successive days in a row? Well, along about two o'clock in the morning, some shadowy figures went over to his bunk, clapped their hand over his mouth, grabbed him out of his bunk, took him into the shower, and they took one of the brushes that were used for the scrubbing of the floor in the barracks. Now, I don't know if you have scrub-brushes or not, but I can almost guarantee that there's not anybody in this room that has a scrub-brush that's quite as stiff as the ones that we had in the Navy, in the barracks. And they would get him in there; and they would take soap and the scrub-brush; and they would go over his pink, little body from one end to the other and make it red. This fellow, usually... every time you saw him off-duty, he was headed for the showers, from that time on.

So when David says to God, "Purge me with hyssop", he is talking about something that is rough and that is used for cleansing. And he's saying, "Whatever it takes to clean me up, I want it done." The implication of, "Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow", has to do with the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, and with the forgiveness of God. But David recognized something in this. What David recognized is that it's really not going to be good for me for God to just simply write this thing off: "Okay, forget it. It never happened." Because if he does that, I will be far more inclined to do it again. And so he says, "Purge me with hyssop"—actually *asked* God to discipline him, *asked* God to grind the lesson in, as it were; to brush the lesson, to *scrub* the lesson into him, so that he would never even *think* about doing that again. I think it's a courageous thing for a person to go to God and say, "Purged me with hyssop. Scrub me, if you must. Get me clean. I don't want this kind of thing ever happening again in my life. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." (I know that "Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow" is in one of the hymns. I don't know if we've got "Purge me with hyssop" in any of the hymns "to scrub me down.") Then he says:

Psalm 51

AKJV

⁸ Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which you have broken may rejoice.

He's saying that, "You know, I really feel like a broken man." I think the broken bones are a metaphor in this particular occasion, because he didn't get any bones broken. But he was, in many ways, a broken man. And he hadn't had any joy since Nathan called him on his sin. He'd been too big for his breeches, as it were. He had had *no* joy. He had had *no* gladness. He had had nothing but misery. And so he asked—after the mercy, and after the purging, and after the cleansing—"Please make me hear joy and gladness."

Psalm 51

AKJV

⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

"Create in me clean heart, O God." That's interesting. Because he didn't say, "Wash my heart", or, "Claim my heart". He said, "Create in me a clean heart." He wanted a new creation—a new start, as it were—in the way that he said this, and to renew a right spirit. There's a recognition in this, folks. And I think, in a way, that the right attitude—the right spirit, the right approach—to God... we have to have *help* with that. It isn't going to be there without some help. David had *had* it, and he wanted it back.

Psalm 51

AKJV

¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence; and take not your holy spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation; and uphold me with your free spirit.

¹³ [*You do that, Father...*] Then will I teach transgressors your ways; and sinners shall be converted to you.

"Because *I'll* know how to preach to them. I'll know how to tell them. Because I'm a sinner."

Psalm 51

AKJV

¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, [...]

Because he was guilty of the blood of Uriah the Hittite.

Psalm 51

AKJV

¹⁴ [...] O God, you God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

¹⁵ O Lord, open you my lips; and my mouth shall show forth your praise.

¹⁶ For you desire not sacrifice; else would I give it: you delight not in burnt offering.

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

You do realize, don't you, that we're reading in the Old Testament. This is a man in the Old Testament who understood justification by grace. He realized that there was not a thing in the world that he could do to get rid of this sin. Sacrifice would not accomplish it. He also realized that the real sacrifice of God was a broken spirit and a contrite... you know, the word contrite means "crushed". "A broken spirit and

a crushed spirit you will not despise.” So David broke himself down, put himself in the dust, fasted and mourned before God, cried out to God and said, “I’m crushed. I’m broken. I’m nothing.”

Psalm 51

AKJV

¹⁸ Do good in your good pleasure to Zion: build you the walls of Jerusalem.

¹⁹ Then shall you be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, [...]

Interesting. “The sacrifices are sacrifices done by people who have *a right to be there*”, he says, “not me.”

Psalm 51

AKJV

¹⁹ [...] with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks on your altar.

I guess, in a way, you need to understand that repentance is not the end—that repentance is really just the beginning of it all. There are many more references in the Bible to repentance, but I thought in conclusion today I would take us back to the first evangelistic sermon that any one of the Apostles ever gave after Pentecost—the first time they stand up in front of a group of people and preach the gospel. Peter, of course, initially on that day of Pentecost in the second chapter of Acts, made his statements about, “These people aren’t drunk. This is the third hour of day. This is what’s spoken by the prophet Joel.” He did all of this stuff about prophecy, and then he says this beginning in verse 22:

Acts 2

KJ2000

²² You men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as you yourselves also know:

“You *know* God approved it. You *know* he was here, and you know *how* God approved him, all the way up and down the line.”

Acts 2

AKJV

²³ Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

And there was *not a man* in front of him now who had laid a hand on Jesus in the course of his death—not a man. It was the *Romans* who took him. It was the *Romans* who scourged him. It was the *Romans* who nailed him to the stake. It was the *Romans* who stuck the spear in his side. It wasn’t the men they were speaking to on this day. And yet he looked them in the eye and said, “You have taken, and by *wicked* hands have crucified and slain.” It is the wicked hands of *all of us* who have crucified him and killed him. In fact, it’s entirely possible that a very large number of those men who were there in front of them were *not even in Jerusalem* when Jesus was killed.

Acts 2

AKJV

²⁴ Whom God has raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be held of it.

So Peter says, “No, no.” He said, “You have taken, and by wicked hands crucified him and killed him, but God raised him from the dead because it was *not possible* that he should stay dead.”

Acts 2

AKJV

²⁵ For David speaks concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved:

²⁶ Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope:

²⁷ Because you will not leave my soul in hell, neither will you suffer your Holy One to see corruption.

Do you realize what the heart and core of Peter’s sermon is? It’s the resurrection of the dead. It’s that Christ died and that he was raised. “*You* killed him, but God brought him back to life.” That’s the heart of it. And *through* that you have hope of eternal life. He said:

Acts 2

AKJV

²⁸ You have made me and made known to me the ways of life. You should make me a full joy with your countenance.

Now Peter, have quoted David [**Psalm 16**], said this:

Acts 2

KJ2000

²⁹ Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day. [*You can go visit.*]

³⁰ Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of his descendants, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne;

³¹ He seeing this before spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hades, neither his flesh did see corruption.

³² This Jesus has God raised up, of which we all are witnesses.

All that group of people standing around there whom they thought were drunk. “*We all* are witnesses.” You don’t have one or two; you’ve got 12. No, you don’t just have 12; you’ve got 120 people who have *seen Jesus alive* after his resurrection. In fact, it may even be by this time that about 500 people had seen him alive after his resurrection. So you’ve got the witnesses.

Acts 2

KJ2000

³³ Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured forth this, which you now see and hear. [*The Holy Spirit and that power.*]

³⁴ For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he said himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit on my right hand,

³⁵ Until I make your foes your footstool.

“Therefore...” Peter comes to the core of his sermon.

Acts 2

KJ2000

³⁶ Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made that same Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ [*Messiah*].

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, [...]

They were convicted. They were convicted of sin. They *believed* what Peter said. They did not feel that there was any way, looking at the faces of these men, that they could deny the resurrection of the dead which they were all testifying to—that Jesus was raised from the dead. They could not deny that the religious establishment (of which many of them were a part) had called for Jesus’ death, and they were cut to the quick.

Acts 2

KJ2000

³⁷ [...] they were pricked in their hearts, 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, [...]

That’s the first thing a person has to do, is repent. The godly sorrow—the sorrow toward God, the recognition of all the bad things that you have done, and to make up your mind you’re going to turn your life around with God’s help.

Acts 2

KJ2000

³⁸ [...] Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

³⁹ For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

⁴⁰ And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.

⁴¹ Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

There were a lot of doctrines that Peter didn’t even need to preach on that day, because they really were not even a question at this particular point in time. What he preached to them was the *death* of Christ for our sins, the *resurrection* of Christ to sit at the right hand of God for our salvation, and *repentance*. And baptism, of course. But repentance is where the thing begins.

Sorrow from the heart—conviction of sin, from the heart—that leads to *repentance* from the heart is where the Christian life begins. It is the first stone laid in the foundation of the doctrine of Christ.

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A Doctrine of Repentance

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