

A Call to Repentance

God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (II Peter 3:9).

Not only is the death of Jesus Christ—God manifested in the flesh—a witness to the world, the nations, the religious leaders and every person, but it is a call to repentance! John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for Jesus. He preached repentance of sins, instructing the people to believe in Christ, Who would come after him. After John the Baptist was put in prison, Jesus began His ministry by preaching repentance: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, *the* Son of God.... Now after the imprisonment of John, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of God and saying, ‘The time has been fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is near at hand; **repent, and believe in the gospel**’ ” (Mark 1:1, 14-15).

Jesus made it clear that He came to call sinners to repentance, “I did not come to call *the* righteous [those who think they are righteous], but sinners to repentance” (Mark 2:17); and, He left no doubt that all must repent of their sins: “Now at the same time, *there* were present some who were telling Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered *and* said to them, ‘Do you suppose that these Galileans were sinners above all Galileans, because they suffered such things? No, I tell you; **but if you do not repent, you shall all likewise perish**. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, do you suppose that these were debtors above all men who dwelt in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; **but if you do not repent, you shall all likewise perish**’ ” (Luke 13:1-5).

All Have Sinned: The New Testament defines sin as the transgression of the law (I John 3:4). A literal translation of this verse from the Greek reads: “**Everyone who practices sin is also practicing lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness.**”

There is no one in the entire history of the world who has not sinned, except Jesus Christ. That is why He alone can be our Redeemer and our Savior. Every person needs to be saved from his or her sins, because “the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

In his epistle to the Romans, the apostle Paul was inspired to declare emphatically that all have sinned—all have transgressed the laws and commandments of God, and all are sentenced to death. The only escape and salvation is through Christ: “What then? Are we [Jews] of ourselves better [than the Gentiles]? Not at all! **For we have already charged both Jews and Gentiles— ALL— with being under sin**. Exactly as it is written: ‘**For there is not a righteous one—not even one!** There is not one who understands; there is not one who seeks after God. They have all gone out of the way; together they have *all* become depraved. There is not *even* one who is practicing kindness. No, there is not so much as one! Their throats *are* like an open grave; with their tongues they have used deceit; *the* venom of asps *is* under their lips, whose mouths are full of cursing and bitterness; their feet *are* swift to shed blood; destruction and misery *are* in their ways; and *the* way of peace they have not known. **There is no fear of God before their eyes.**’ Now then, we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, **so that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.... For all have sinned, and have come short of the glory of God**” (Rom. 3:9-19, 23).

On the day of Pentecost, just fifty-four days after the crucifixion, the apostles began preaching Jesus Christ’s gospel of repentance for the remission of sins. On that day, God poured out His Holy Spirit in power, and the apostles spoke in a multitude of languages as a fantastic witness to the Jews from all nations gathered at the temple in Jerusalem for the feast day, who each heard the

Gospel in his own language (Acts 2:1-18). When they wondered what this miracle meant, the apostle Peter was inspired to powerfully preach Christ and repentance of sin. His moving witness to the Jews who had gathered at the temple ended with these words: “ ‘Therefore, let all *the* house of Israel know with full assurance that God has made this *same* Jesus, Whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ Now after hearing *this*, they were cut to the heart [convicted of their sins]; and they said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘**Repent and be baptized each one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for *the* remission of sins, and you yourselves shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**’... And with many other words he earnestly testified and exhorted, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’ **Then those who joyfully received his message were baptized;** and about three thousand souls were added that day” (Acts 2:36-40).

The Apostle Paul’s Call to Repentance: When Paul came to Athens, the center of the Greek pagan religions, he preached a powerful message of repentance. As it is recorded in Acts, he exhorted the Athenians to repent of their idolatries and vain religious practices: “Then Paul stood in *the* center of Mars’ hill *and* said, ‘Men, Athenians, I perceive *that* in all things you are very reverent to deities; for *as* I was passing through and observing the objects of your veneration, I also found an altar on which was inscribed, “To an unknown God.” So then, He Whom you worship in ignorance *is* the one *that* I proclaim to you.

“He *is* the God Who made the world and all things that *are* in it. Being *the* Lord of heaven and earth, He does not dwell in temples made by hands; nor is He served by the hands of men, as *though* He needs anything, *for* He gives to all life and breath and all things. And He made of one blood all the nations of men to dwell upon all the face of the earth, having determined beforehand *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their dwelling, in order **that they might seek the Lord, if perhaps they might feel after Him and might find Him; though truly, He is not far from each one of us,** for in Him we live and move and have our being; as some of the poets among you also have said, ‘For we are His offspring.’

“Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we should not think that the Godhead *is* like that which *is made* of gold, or silver, or stone—a graven thing of art *devised by the* imagination of man. For *although* God has indeed overlooked the times of this ignorance, **He now commands all men everywhere to repent,** because He has set a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man Whom He has appointed, having given proof to all *by* raising Him from *the* dead” (Acts 17:22-31). Paul’s message of repentance was the same as Jesus Christ’s: “If you do not repent, you shall likewise perish.”

The Meaning of Repentance: Because of the witness that Jesus Christ has given to the world—all nations, all religions and all people—He commands all men and women to repent and turn to God with all their hearts. Today, God’s judgment is at the door. None shall escape unless he or she repents!

What is repentance? There are two kinds of repentance. One is worldly repentance, which is a shallow repentance that leads to death. The other is godly repentance that leads to forgiveness and salvation. The apostle Paul said, “For sorrow unto repentance before God works out salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world works out death” (II Cor. 7:10).

Godly repentance means a complete abhorrence of one’s sins, a complete turning from sin—from the transgression of the laws and commandments of God. Repentance is a complete amendment of life, a turning away from one’s own sinful way to the way of love and obedience, keeping the laws and commandments of God and living by every word of God.

In the book of Psalms, we find King David’s prayer of repentance, uttered when Nathan the prophet came to him after David’s affair with Bathsheba and the killing of her husband Uriah. This prayer shows David’s complete abhorrence of sin and self as he cried out to God with tears of

anguish and sorrow, begging for His mercy and forgiveness. David's repentance was to God, not to any man. He did not confess his sins to a priest. He did not confess his sins to Nathan the prophet. Just as David did, we are to confess our sins directly to God the Father and Jesus Christ, not to a man. King David's prayer has been preserved for us so that we can understand the attitude of true repentance: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion, blot out my transgressions. **Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin, for I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.**

"Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done evil in Your sight, that You might be justified when You speak and be in the right when You judge. Behold, **I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.** Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part You shall make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness that the bones which You have broken may rejoice. **Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.** Cast me not away from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and let *Your* free spirit uphold me.... **Deliver me from the guilt of shedding blood, O God, O God of my salvation"** (Psa. 51:1-14).

Repentance is the first step in the sinner's reconciliation with God and Christ. God the Father through His Spirit must open a person's mind to understand that he or she is a sinner against Him. As David said, "I have sinned against You and You alone." Then one must believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, that it is because of one's own sins that He had to die. True belief brings repentance and necessitates confessing one's sins to God and asking for forgiveness, remission and pardon of those sins through the blood of Christ. True, deep, godly repentance will produce a profound change in a person's mind and attitude, which will result in a continuous desire to live by every word of God. The truly repentant person will turn from evil thoughts and ungodly practices and will seek to conform his or her life to the will of God as revealed in the Bible and as led by the Holy Spirit. Repentance and confession of sins is an ongoing process in a Christian's spiritual growth toward perfection in Jesus Christ.

Upon true, heartfelt repentance, God is ready and willing to forgive sin, as shown in another of David's prayers of repentance: "**Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I cry unto You all day long.** Rejoice the soul of Your servant, for to You, O LORD, do I lift up my soul, **for You, LORD, are good and ready to forgive,** and rich in mercy to all those who call upon You. Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer, and attend to the voice of my supplications. **In the day of my trouble I will call upon You, for You will answer me"** (Psa. 86:3-7).

God does not require animal sacrifices for the propitiation of sin. He does not require the sinner to perform rote prayers with the aid of a strand of beads. He does not require hundreds of reiterations of "Hail Mary" or "Our Father." God requires only that the sinner have a broken and contrite heart and genuinely repent: "For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not take pleasure in burnt offering. **The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise"** (Psa. 51:16-17).

The apostle John wrote, "If we confess our own sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). If we repent and confess our sins directly to the Father in heartfelt prayer, He will certainly forgive us. Once our sins are forgiven, we are to quit living in sin as Jesus said, "Sin no more, so that something worse does not happen to you"; and "Go, and sin no more" (John 5:14; 8:11).

The prophet Isaiah wrote: " **Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do good; seek judgment, reprove the**

oppressor. Judge the orphan, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together,' says the LORD. **‘Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured *with* the sword;’** for the mouth of the LORD has spoken *it*” (Isa. 1:16-20).

The Meaning of Water Baptism: After accepting Jesus as one’s personal Savior, one must be baptized by complete immersion in water for the remission of sins. Water baptism symbolizes the death and burial of each repentant believer—a spiritual conjoining into the death of Christ. Through this baptismal death we become a partaker of the crucifixion and death of Christ, Whose blood is applied as full payment for our sins. Rising up out of the water symbolizes our being conjoined with Jesus in resurrection. When we rise out of the watery grave of baptism, we rise to newness of life. In order to become a new person, we must receive the begetting of the Holy Spirit from God the Father through the laying on of hands. We are then led by the Holy Spirit to walk in loving obedience to the Father and to Jesus Christ.

Paul was most emphatic when he wrote that after baptism we are not to live in sin any longer! “What then shall we say? Shall we continue in sin, so that grace may abound? **MAY IT NEVER BE!** We who died to sin, how shall we live any longer therein? Or are you ignorant that we, as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him by baptism into death; so that, just as Christ was raised from *the* dead by the glory of the Father, in the same way, we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been conjoined together in the likeness of His death, so also shall we be *in the likeness* of His resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man was co-crucified with *Him* in order that the body of sin might be destroyed, so that we might no longer be enslaved to sin; Because the one who has died *to sin* has been justified from sin. Now if we died together with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Rom. 6:1-8).

After true, godly repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sin, the new believer is justified and put in right standing with God the Father. The apostle Paul explained this operation of God’s grace: “Are being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that *is* in Christ Jesus; Whom God has openly manifested *to be* a propitiation through faith in His blood, in order to demonstrate His righteousness, in respect to the remission of the sins that are past.... Even the righteousness of God *that is* through *the* faith of Jesus Christ, toward all and upon all those who believe: for there is no difference” (Rom. 3:24-25, 22).

It is Jesus Christ’s faith that He had when He willingly gave Himself to be beaten, scourged and crucified that saves us from sins and justifies us to God the Father. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus imparts His faith to us so that we may live by faith: “I have been crucified [through baptism] with Christ, yet I live. *Indeed*, it is no longer I; but Christ lives in me. For *the life* that I am now living in *the* flesh, I live by faith—that *very faith* of the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Salvation by Grace: Once we have been justified, we continually stand in a state of grace before God: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Whom **we also have access by faith into this grace in which we stand**, and we ourselves boast in *the* hope of the glory of God. And not only *this*, but we also boast in tribulations, realizing that tribulation brings forth endurance, and endurance *brings forth* character, and character *brings forth* hope. **And the hope of God never makes us ashamed, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which has been given to us**” (Rom. 5:1-5).

Salvation by grace does not confer a license to sin with impunity. Neither Christ nor the apostles ever taught such a doctrine. Jesus Himself said, if we love Him, we will keep His commandments:

“If you love Me, keep the commandments—namely My commandments.... The one who has My commandments and is keeping them, that is the one who loves Me; and the one who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him.... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. The one who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word that you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s, Who sent Me” (John 14:15, 21, 23-24). In his first epistle, the apostle John shows that we must keep God’s commandments. In fact, when we are keeping His commandments, we know that we know Jesus Christ and are being perfected in love: “And by this *standard* we know that we know Him: if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. On the other hand, **if anyone is keeping His Word, truly in this one the love of God is being perfected.** By this *means* we know that we are in Him” (I John 2:3-5). Many professing Christians claim that they “love the Lord” but then refuse to keep His commandments. To love God is more than an emotion. Our actions must also reflect that love through our obedience. John also wrote: “By this *standard* we know that we love the children of God: when we love God and keep His commandments. **For this is the love of God: that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome**” (I John 5:2-3).

The apostle James, a brother of the Lord Jesus Christ, also wrote that we must keep the commandments of God: “For *if* anyone keeps the whole law, but sins in one *aspect*, he becomes guilty of all. For He Who said, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘You shall not commit murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but you commit murder, you have become a transgressor of *the* law. In this manner speak and in this manner behave: as those who are about to be judged by *the* law of freedom” (James 2:10-12).

James further wrote that “**faith, if it does not have works, is dead, by itself** [it will lead to death]. But someone is going to say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ *My answer is:* You prove your faith to me through your works, and I will prove my faith to you through my works. Do you believe that God is one? You do well *to believe this*. Even the demons believe—and tremble *in fear*. But are you willing to understand, O foolish man, that **faith without works is dead**? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac, his own son, upon the altar? **Do you not see that faith was working together with his works, and by works his faith was perfected?** And the scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Now Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness’; and he was called a friend of God. You see, then, that **a man is justified by works, and not by faith only**” (James 2:17-24).

Salvation by grace is demonstrated in works—not the humanly devised traditions and works of religion but the good works of loving God and keeping His commandments as Paul notes, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this *especially* is not of your own selves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, so that no one may boast. **For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto *the* good works that God ordained beforehand in order that we might walk in them**” (Eph. 2:8-10).

When we have received the begetting of the Holy Spirit from God the Father, we are to walk in the way of the Lord and to love God the Father and Jesus Christ with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength (Mark 12:29-34). We are to keep the commandments of God from the heart in the spirit of the law. Finally, we are to grow in grace and knowledge and to be faithful unto death. Then, at the return of Jesus Christ, we will be resurrected to eternal life and glory as a spirit son or daughter of God. To bring many sons and daughters to glory is the reason why Jesus Christ died!

Jesus Christ died for your sins, and He can be your personal Savior. You have a choice: either to repent and to believe in Jesus, accepting His sacrifice for your sins—or to reject Christ and His

words and to receive the judgment of God and eternal death. What will you do? You will be held accountable for your decision. You must choose!