

“Repentance” *Forgotten God* by Francis Chan, Chapter 6

When people give their lives to God in exchange for a ticket out of hell, there is often no turning or change of direction, which is the definition of **repentance**. If all you want is a little Jesus to "spiritualize" your life, a little extra God to keep you out of hell, you are missing out on the fullness of life you were created for.

Not only this, you don't need the Holy Spirit. You don't need the Holy Spirit if you are merely seeking to live a semi-moral life and attend church regularly. You can find people of all sorts in many religions doing that quite nicely without Him. You only need the Holy Spirit's guidance and help if you truly want to follow the Way of Jesus Christ. You only need Him if you desire to "obey everything" He commanded and to teach others to do the same (Matt. 28:18-20). You only need the Holy Spirit if you have genuinely repented and believe. And you only need the Holy Spirit if you understand that you are called to share in Christ's suffering and death, as well as His resurrection (Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; Phil. 3:10-11). Paul demonstrates this when he wrote:

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body.” (2 Cor.4:7-11 NIV)

I think repentance is one of those words we hear a lot but maybe don't incorporate into our lives very often. When I use the word repent, I think about the time I was in a dating relationship, until one day a girl named Lisa came to my church as a guest soloist and caught my attention. After getting to know her, I knew she was the one I wanted to be with. I didn't consider it an option to ask Lisa if she wanted to date me *also*. I knew I had to break off the other relationship if I wanted to begin one with Lisa. In a sense, this is what repentance is like when we meet Jesus: **We totally change direction.**

Some people encounter Jesus and say, "Sweet! Jesus, do You want to join the party of my life with this sin, that addiction, this destructive relationship, and we'll all just coexist together?" But repentance means saying, "Sweet Jesus, You are the best thing that has ever happened to me! I want to turn from all the sin and selfishness that rules me. I want to let it go and walk with You. Only You. You are my life now. Help me to walk away from the enslaving, **worthless** things in life."

Do you see the difference between these two examples? Which do you think more accurately portrays your own life? Is there anything you need to go and make right with your Savior, the One who was killed for your sake? If so, don't hesitate to [stop] and spend the necessary time. [to do so]. Nothing else matters more than this relationship.

A Letter To The Church: "Forgetting What Is Behind"

I love Chan's illustration of repentance. I don't know about you, but I relate all too well to the idea of asking Jesus to "date me also". I still struggle with asking God to join me and come along with all my agendas, all my pride, all my touchy-subject-issues, and all the ways I want my way, instead of surrendering all those things and allowing Him to reshape and mold those areas in my life.

I think many people look at repentance as a one-time thing. "I declared Christ Lord and Savior. I'm good now!". That doesn't sound like a *relationship* to me. When I married Bianca I didn't say "I do" once and then chose to live a life of infidelity, lust, selfishness, etc. I choose to say "I Do" every day. In fact, the more you grow in marriage the more you realize you have to say "I Do" minute by minute, moment by moment. In the same way repentance is a moment by moment "I Do" to Christ. It's an active lifestyle of choosing Christ over everything else that could possibly keep me from further intimacy with Him.

Repentance is fleshed out in many ways. It's a multi-faceted act of faith. Take a look at the examples below and the scriptures that I've paired with each one. Take time as a group to consider how each of these, in their own way, demonstrate a unique side of what repentance looks like.

1. A complete change in direction; A completely new approach and perspective (Luke 19:1-10)
2. Turning away from sin and moving toward a godly way of living (Luke 7:36-50)
3. Sincere regret or remorse over sin that leads to sincere action in the opposite direction of that sin in response to an understanding of the limitless kindness and love that God offers sinful creatures when they turn to Him (Rom 2:4)
4. An action that God loves so much that he draws near to us when we do it (James 4)
5. Considering something worthless compared to the supreme value of knowing Christ (Phil 3:13)

Examples 1-4 are all examples we frequently think of when it comes to repentance. For a quick second, I want to take a quick note on the 5th example I provided. I think this side of repentance doesn't get the attention it deserves.

In context, Paul is listing off his immaculate religious resumé in Philippians 3. He talks about things that he has every right to boast about, but I think it's worth noting that when Paul talks about his persecution of the church he was describing something that he was ONCE proud of, but now would consider something that is not worth looking back on at all. A memory that, for any person, probably came in tow with regret and shame. J.I. Packer takes this idea and further develops it. He notes that "considering it all loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ" (Phil 3) includes the things we are proud of and the things we are not. Both. Not just religious resume, but sin. Not just things we once held as valuable, but things that are also poisons to us. Paul's word here for "useless" pertains to "dung", "refuse". A word used in medical journals at the time in Greece to indicate human filth. Paul is saying EVERYTHING is considered refuse/dung/filth (think of dog poop) compared to the infinite value of KNOWING GOD (Phil 3:8). What a crazy thing! That we could KNOW God. And yet, how often do we allow our hearts, minds, souls, and selves to be gripped by dog poop? In that vein, what sane person thinks of dog poop all day?

Well... we do.

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The simplest way to put it is that nothing, good or bad, past or present or future, could ever come close to the treasure of knowing Christ in an intimate relationship. Our highest highs and lowest lows are nothing compared to the value of knowing Christ. Our greatest wounds, the things we wish had never happened and the things we wish had happened differently. All of it is WORTHLESS compared to knowing Christ.

And this is why we follow Paul's example in Philippians 4. "We forget what is behind and we strain onward toward what is ahead." In fact, Paul says that this type of perspective is an indicator of maturity in a believer. My encouragement for you today is to forget what is behind and strain onward toward what is ahead. Use this time to confess the things you have been considering valuable and repent toward the one true treasure.

Run Well.

Christian