

Repentance: An Operating Principle of Your Life

By Paris Reidhead*

For our meditation this evening, I would like to ask you to turn with me to several Scriptures still dealing with this tremendously important theme of Repentance. Tonight I would like to have you consider the repentance in the life as it was preached by our Lord Jesus Christ. Will you turn to Mark, Chapter 1, for our first Scripture. This is the opening of the ministry of our Lord Jesus. It began at this point.

I saw in an article, written and distributed actually to you the other day, a statement that emphasizes the need for the very messages we have been bringing. It began the paragraph by saying, "Repentance is godly sorrow for sin." Well, we understand that godly sorrow works repentance, but if repentance is sorrow, then repentance is an emotion, and when God commands people to repent He is commanding an emotion, and as we understand human personality emotions are not under the control of our will. Therefore we have got to see that repentance is not primarily an emotional change. It is a change of direction, a change of intention, a change of purpose, and a change of will. And to repent is as one, driving, decides he is going the wrong way. He does not only feel badly about the amount of distance he has lost, but he also recognizes that there is no amount of emotion that is going to suffice if he continues headed the same way. So godly sorrow is going to cause him to pull over to the side of the road, but repentance is going to cause him to turn around and go the other way. We have got to recognize that this is what we mean by repentance, a complete change of direction. And yet, you are going to read, and I trust you will become sensitive to it so that you will recognize that there is a difference. We are not just picking at words, dear friends. We are not talking about — I am not a lint picker by nature, just going around, hunting for theological dandruff on someone's shoulder that I can brush off. That is not what we are concerned about. We are concerned about one of the great basic principles and premises of our faith. "Except you repent, you will perish" (Luk. 13:3). Now, if repentance is an emotion, then it is one thing. But if it represents something beyond an emotion, or induced and excited by an emotion, but beyond an emotion, then it is imperative that we should face our generation of unsaved people with the clear teaching of the Word of God and the clear claims of Christ.

Now notice: "Now after that John the Baptist was put in prison" (and I am reading from Mark 1:14), "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mar. 1:14-15).

John's message was repentance. It is back here as clearly as it can be stated: "John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mar. 1:4). And now our Lord Jesus has come, continuing the ministry for which John prepared the way by his preaching. And, lest there should be any misunderstanding, His first message, His opening sermon is repent.

Now we recognize that repentance is, as we have stated, a change of mind, a change of will. We realize it is the work of the Spirit of God in one sense, causing us to see the holiness of God, causing us to see the enormity of our crime of willing our own will and choosing our own way, and turning to our own way. But we recognize that it is also a human responsibility, and it was our Lord Jesus that faced His generation, saying, Repent, and believe. Repent and believe.

I remember, as I have told you of being in my early days, following some of the good writers that I had known who said that repentance was Jewish and not to be preached in this time, and period, and economy; and I said the same thing. But when I came to the fact that on Mars Hill Paul said, "Now God commandeth all men everywhere to repent," and that it had never been abrogated, never been rescinded, never been changed (Act. 17:30). I had to assume that God was still "commanding all men everywhere to repent," that He had not changed it. And again, when he took leave of the Ephesian elders, he said, (and these were Gentiles) I was with you from house to house, night and day, teaching repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And when he stood before King Agrippa, 35 years after he began, and gave an account of his ministry, he said, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but delivered to them of Damascus and Jerusalem, the Jews and the Gentiles, how that they must repent and bring forth works meet for repentance" (Act. 26:19-20).

I am praying, and I am sure that this is one prayer that the Lord is going to answer, that we will soon have a reprint of Dr. Ironside's¹ little book, Except You Repent. I would love to have it to distribute by the hundreds.

Now our Lord Jesus is saying, Repent. Repent. And, believe the Gospel. Repentance therefore is a preparation of mind, a preparation of spirit that is necessary before, one can savingly believe the Gospel. It is stated elsewhere in Romans 10:9 by Paul: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Jesus to be Lord" - repent, *metanoia* - change of mind - about who is to be boss, who is to rule, who is to govern, what guide, what are going to be the guide lines of your life, and the charter of your life. This is all involved in this little word repent. So it implies that as long as one has made up his mind he is going to rule his life, and govern his life, and choose his course, he cannot savingly believe the Gospel - with the intellect, but not with the heart. And this is the beginning of the Lord's ministry.

In Luke the 5th Chapter, and the 32nd verse, "Our Lord Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luk. 5:31-32). It is that our Lord has identified that this is the reason for His coming, to call sinners to repentance, the renunciation of their right to rule, the right to govern their lives. We have got to face people with this definition of sin.

You see, unfortunately, we as evangelicals have been talking about sins: God is angry with a man because he lies, and they are in trouble with God because they steal, and God is going to send them to hell because they have committed immorality. Now this is true, but it is only a fraction of the truth. The lying, the stealing, the immorality and whatever else is there, is but the bullets that come out of the gun. It is not the bullets that make war, it is the intention to destroy that changes the firing of a gun into an act of war. It is that the lie, and the theft, and the immorality, is but the bullet out of the sinner's gun, against God in which he has shown that he is at war with government, he is at war with God. And sinners are people that have turned to their own way. They have chosen how they are going to rule and govern their lives. To repent is to change one's mind. Now you must see this if you are to understand that which we are seeking to establish as the basic premise of all the preaching.

Now you see, the reason why I am dwelling on this is the fact that we have people in churches across our land that have intellectually agreed with the Gospel, but they have never changed their minds about who is going to be boss. And so they are impenitent believers. They are still rebels, but they are theologically fitted rebels, outfitted rebels. They now have learned that Christ was born of a virgin, and lived a sinless life, died an atoning death, was raised from the dead, but they have felt that if they could grasp this and hold it to be so, that they could go on in their rebellion. This is the ancient theological crime of antinomianism. And He said, He came to call sinners to repentance. Not sorrow for what they have done, but to a complete change of mind, and will, and intention, and purpose. Until a person does that, he remains the sinner, regardless of how many times he has been baptized, or how much theology he has been able to store away. A squirrel is a squirrel even if he has the whole trunk of a tree stuffed with acorns. The fact that he has picked them up from where they have fallen, and tucked them where he could use them, does not, has not changed him. To be a Christian is something more than to pick up little fragments of theology that have fallen from the tree of revelation and hide them away in one's memory. It is to have supernatural and glorious take place in the life that completely changes the direction, and the aim, and the end, and the purpose, and the course of the life. He came to call sinners to repentance, and anyone that has not repented is a sinner. There is no way of escaping from being a sinner under the just condemnation of sinners until there is repentance. So this was the message of Christ.

And we have already added to it just in passing message of the Apostle. Now we have seen at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, in the midst of His ministry; let's look for a moment of what He said after His resurrection. Will you turn to Luke 24, verses 46 and 47. Our Lord has been instructing His followers after the resurrection. In verse 44, "He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I as yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures. And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that" - or that - so that - "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations,

¹ Henry Allen "Harry" Ironside (1876 – 1951) A Canadian-American Bible teacher, preacher, theologian, and author.

beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things” (Luk. 24:44-48). This is the message which we send with our missionaries. Repentance and remission of sins. There has been no change now after the resurrection. It is to be preached not just to the Jews, but among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. No change, no alteration. It represents a basic, fundamental act of the mind and will, of the whole personality that God demands before there can be forgiveness. It is literally, “repentance unto remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations.” So we find that this then is the ministry of the Lord, in the beginning, in the middle, and at the conclusion.

Well now has His mind changed since then? Will you turn to Revelation, Chapter 3. And here we find that He is speaking again, as far as we know, (it is hard to tell how many years this was after the resurrection, but it could have been as late as 90 A.D., perhaps earlier. But at any rate, many years, several decades have elapsed since our Lord spoke the last words after His resurrection. And now He is writing unto the church of the Laodiceans, the last of the seven churches. If you accept this chronologically it would be the present church. If you would accept it as being that all seven were to be found at all times, then certainly this still would be applicable. But hear it as I read it: “And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, he with Me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev. 3:14-22).

Now this is the message of Christ to the church. It was the message of Christ to sinners, it was the message concerning His message to sinners, it was the message that He gave to His Apostles that they were to carry to all nations. And now as He speaks directly through this last of the number that was with Him on that day after the resurrection when He told them to open their eyes that they should understand the Scriptures and sent them to preach repentance, and remission of sins unto all nations. Now He speaks, in a sense the last direct message from the Head of the church to the church. And here it is, “As many as I love I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous, therefore, and repent.” They became His at this threshold of repentance and faith, a change of mind; they had had a revelation that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh, very God of very God. They had seen that. They at that point had renounced their right to rule. They had thrown down the weapons they had used in fighting God, and had sued for peace on His terms. But now they have gotten into the church, there has come a languor and coldness of spirit. They are not aware of it. It has been so subtle. You know, when the heat goes off in the winter time, you are not cold all of a sudden. There is a little lingering heat that is there, and in the walls, and in the room, and so the first moment after the furnace has failed, and the fires are gone out, you are not too troubled about it. Then a little later, you sense a coolness come, but it is not frightening. But when you go and see that the electricity is off, and the oil burner won’t run, and you see that the fire is out, and the coal won’t start, whatever it is that has kept the heat from coming.

The weather is cold outside... I think of my own experience in Minnesota. You know people that I find today think of the cold regions of the world as the Arctic, Minnesota, and Antarctic, in that order; and we had it cold, 45 below zero frequently. And for one period it didn’t get above zero for 30 days at all, and then it was below zero for a total of 45 days. And your blood changed sort of to slush during the course of those weeks. I remember we had a roaring fire in a round oak burner in the room, left a glass sitting on the window sill, and it was broken, just a junk of ice in the glass over on the window sill over against the window. Well, no storm windows. We were up in a place where we knew it was cold, and we were aware of that stove, that little old round oak burner that had just consumed cords of wood, and if you sat in front of it you got sunburned on your – or heat burned on your face, and your back was frozen that’s where they invented the spit for the barbecue, it was back in Minnesota where they used to turn around so fast in front of the old burner. We knew it was cold.

Would God that the church of Jesus Christ would know when the fire, vision, and burden is gone. This is what our Lord said; “you are neither hot nor cold, just lukewarm.” This is the thing that I think is most devastating and frightening. When a person

is utterly antagonistic to the Gospel, there is something that you can do with that. He is in open defiance. He is in constant conflict. This is understandable. When a person is hot for the Lord Jesus, burdened for souls, witnessing, praying, eager for God, on the press for the Lord. This is understandable. But when a person can just take it or leave it alone, this is the thing that the Lord could not understand. You see, the testimony is that Jesus Christ is God, God come in the flesh, and He is God who clothed Himself with mortality, that covered Himself with humanity, and identified Himself with all of our needs, and tests, and pressures, God come in the flesh. And then, having kept the law perfectly and pleased the Father, He could die because He was just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.

Now the Apostle Paul believed that this was rank heresy, that the Christians were imposters, that they were starting a new nationalist movement to undermine the authority of proper Judaism, and he felt that the only possible way of dealing with these cantankerous people was to exterminate them. And he did very well at it for a while, but one day he met Jesus Christ face to face on the road to Damascus. And insistently everything is changed. There is a complete right about face. He was headed into Damascus for the express purpose of searching out the Christians, testifying against them, and seeing them either imprisoned or killed. But he met Jesus Christ. He went into Damascus all right, but in a sense can we say, he went in backwards? He had completely changed around and went in as a Christian. He went in as one who had seen the Son of God in His glory, who had heard Him speak, and had said in response, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" (Act. 9:6) And for the remainder of his life, he is hot for the Lord Jesus Christ, always on the press, always seeking to make his life count for the glory of Christ, esteeming neither riches, nor honor, nor position; nothing has meaning, nothing has value because one day he met Jesus Christ face to face. I do not believe that he was anything more than a man. I believe that when the record is unfolded he will have had as many faults and failures as any of us have had. I do not believe in the Deity of the Apostle Paul; he was just a sinner, saved by grace and the chief of sinners, not always perfect in his judgment. (See I Tim. 1:15) But you know, his life was so completely abandoned to the Lord Jesus, so totally poured out in loving surrender to every purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ that God could constantly use him, and get glory from him.

I feel this is exactly what our Lord is inditing here. They have seen Him, these people to whom He writes. They are convinced that He is God, and they are not cold in their antagonism, neither are they hot in their hunger, in their burden, in their vision. They are just sort of lukewarm. He said of them, This is so repulsive, so utterly nauseating to the Son of God, that there is only one thing He can do, "I will spue thee out of My mouth" (Rev. 3:16).

Now if you sense in your heart lukewarmness, if you discover that at some time in the past you had greater zeal, and greater hunger, and greater yearning, and longing, and greater burden than you have tonight, then you know what has happened. You are here. You are not out in the world. You have not apostatized. You have not gone back into some repulsive sin. You are here, but let me ask you, Are you as you once were? Or has something come in to dampen your zeal? Have ashes come around the hot coal of hunger for God? Could it be that there is a lukewarmness that comes when we are not even aware of it that is grievous to Him? I believe that when He writes He is writing to me. I am not pointing at you. I am, but I have got three fingers pointed at me, so don't take it personally. He is writing to me. He is asking me to examine my heart, because you see, back there when I met Him, I said, Lord, from here on You are going to rule, and govern, and control, and direct my life. It is Yours. But there are so many cross winds, and cross currents, so many ruts, so many detours, so much that would come as cold clammy rain upon the human spirit, and He is concerned about me tonight. He is concerned about you. What are you going to do when you discover that with all candor and honesty your love for Christ has gone down and become dimmed, and the flame of it is not as it once was. What are you going to do about it?

You say, Well I am older. This is no matter of age. Well, I have greater poise and judgment. This is not a matter of poise and judgment. There is only one thing to say: Is it lukewarmness? Has ashes come where flame once blazed? If so, He said, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3:19). What He said to sinners, His instructions to the Apostles become a continuing operating principle in the life of the Christian. When you discover that lukewarmness has come, that zeal has waned, your hunger is gone, in some degree at least the temperature is down. It may not be zero yet; it may just be 64, but it is too uncomfortable to sit there. He said, Be zealous about this. Don't wait until icicles are on your nose and ears; don't wait until frost has numbed you. If you sense that there is a waning, deal with it then, deal with it at that point. Just as you have to deal with sin as the thought.

My friend, if you do not deal with the thought of sin, as though it were the finished act, I have every reason to believe that sooner or later that act will be finished. If you do not judge the intention as you would have judged in other days the deed, then you have every reason to expect that sooner or later the intention is going to come to fruition and fulfillment. The point for us to become zealous is not when the thermometer on the wall says it is 32°, and the children are in the house and it is cold, and you are frightened concerning their health. It is when you just notice sufficient change in the temperature to be perceptible, right then get busy with it. And when you discover that there is any change in your spiritual temperature, that is the time and the place to show your zeal, because He has accompanied this with a warning. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." You and I can be absolutely certain of this, that if we do not tend to the flame on the altar of our heart, the Lord is going to tend to it for us. It is the course of wisdom for us to recognize that the principle, that steered us toward Him, is the principle by which He expects to steer continually toward Him. When you have found as a sinner that you were headed the wrong way, and you made a right about face, and said, From now on Jesus Christ is as He has presented by the right hand of the Father, Prince and Savior, you commenced well. But what today when you discover that your zeal is greater here and there, and for these peripheral things, these other interests, these other concerns, these other burdens, than for Him, instantly deal with it. Do not wait until it has gone to the point where it is going to mean the major thing. Deal with it there.

I have used the analogy, and I use it again because it is true, coming back this afternoon on the road, the car caught in what was apparently an indentation in the pavement. I was not paying too strict attention, and the first thing I knew the tires on the right of my car were buzzing with the sound that they make when they have hit the edge of the concrete. Well now, I could have let it have gone unattended, but when the inevitable would have been some kind of calamity, and tragedy, and death. So the moment that I heard that little change in sound, I became alert to the fact that there had been a drift, even though I had not turned, and I dealt with it and got back on the road. This was almost automatic, and it was instinctive. And we do it continuously. We have got to understand that this is what our Lord is speaking about, that repentance is the change of intention from pleasing ourself to pleasing Him, and whenever we would drift back to pleasing ourself, we immediately come back to pleasing Him. It is constant. So, it begins, it continues, and it finishes. This is going to be an operating principle throughout the course of our life. Do you see it as such?

"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). Here is a basic principle that we must understand. There is such a tendency on the part of Christians to feel that, because they have been in the way for many years, that they are themselves of some better essence than the others. And it was Mel Trotter who, looking out, seeing a staggering man going down the sidewalk, summarized it for all of us, "There but for the grace of God go I." And there is a tendency on the part of us that when we are in the church for ten, fifteen, twenty years, to look askance at others, and feel that somehow, because we have been in the environment of the truth, that we ourselves are of some different essence. But Paul understood it, because he had seen the Lord properly. He had seen himself properly, and he said, "I know that in me and my flesh there dwelleth no good thing," and "the things I count gain to me, I count loss to Christ" (Rom. 7:18; Php. 3:7).

Oh, if you ever come to the place where you see yourself in your own intrinsic essence, in your own nature, as being anything else than wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, then you know that spiritual pride has come in, and spiritual pride is one of the things that is condemned every place where God has dealt with His people. And it behooves us to recognize that there is only one thing that can possibly enrich us, and that is gold tried in the fire; and this gold, our resurrected Lord in His enthroned glory, the Lord Jesus Christ, the gold of the Tabernacle, in every place it is used, speaks of our Lord in His Deity. And He says, "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire" (Rev. 3:18a). And it is the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the message, if you will read the hymns in your hymnbook, of Dr. Simpson². You will find that the one thing that he saw, and it is expressed in almost every hymn, was that "not I, but Christ" (Gal. 2:20). And whenever we come to the place that it is I, and not Christ, then we are in the place where God is going to have to deal with us. Christ our wisdom, Christ our righteousness, Christ our sanctification, Christ our redemption. And He is to be all and in all, and fill us with Himself.

² Albert Benjamin Simpson (1843-1919) founder of The Christian and Missionary Alliance

You can be sure of this, that if you come to the place that you feel that tomorrow you are adequate for its tests and needs, then you are on the very threshold of failure, some kind of disaster, and great grief. He says, I want you to understand, I love you too much to let you get by with it. I am going to rebuke you; I am going to chasten you. And when you come to think, and I come to think, that we are something of ourselves, how wonderful it is and gracious it is of God to allow us to get tripped up with a short rope, so that we are right on our faces again, prostrate before Him, and He has been so kind to us; when you fail, don't grieve in that sense that the Lord has put you into circumstances that have pressed you to Him. Rejoice, because you were headed in the wrong way. You had thought that in you of yourself there was something. And I am confident of this, that God loves us too much to let us get by with it. And He is going to bring circumstances and situations that will bring us face down before Him, and we will hear His counsel, "Buy of Me gold tried in the fire."

This is the Apostle Paul again, "I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). There is the gold, tried in the furnace. And the Lord Jesus is quite prepared to live in you His own life of resurrection victory and glory, but remember, you only release Him so to live when you have turned away from any confidence in yourself. As we insist that the cross must go through you, it is simply that the risen Lord might reign and live in you. This is repentance, a continuous change of mind from anything that would draw us away from Him. And that is an attitude you have to make toward anything in your business, in your home, in your family. Whenever you see that the way are going, or thinking about going, veers off, don't — recognize this, that the change of mind is to bring you back to His way to that strait, that narrow way. Repentance, therefore, is not just an act that you performed. It is an operating principle of your life. It has got to follow in every step you take. This is what our Lord taught us, from His opening ministry to the close of His testimony to the church.

Let us bow together in prayer. Shall we use the time in prayer. We think of the church. We are asking God in these days to make every cold heart to come alive with hot love for Him, and eyes that have been beholden to see the fields white unto harvest. I believe the Spirit of God would have us in the light of our forthcoming missionary convention ask God for a mighty moving of the Holy Spirit upon all the speakers, upon all the ministry, in order that there shall come to pass that of which we have read, for He says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man will open the door I will come in and sup with Him" (Rev. 3:20). How we long for revival blessing as well as missionary vision and burden to come. So let us ask God together as a people now for the working of His Spirit upon us in preparation that we might be a force for the Lord, not the field, but the force, as the Spirit of God will use the prayer meetings next week and all the ministries, and that there might be in all of our hearts wherever necessary that repentance, that change of mind, from ours to His, that transformation by the renewing of our minds.

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Wednesday Evening, September 26, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.