

His loving and Fatherly rule and authority over your life. In order to do this one must see and recognize the self's inability to be sufficient unto itself. Considered in itself the self is utterly inadequate to the task of true life. With this recognition one can authentically look to God for the Strength, the Wisdom, and the Life that only He can provide. It is not an accident that Scripture refers to God as our Strength, our Wisdom, and our Life. But this will only sound like poetry and hyperbole until we understand the deep practical need for Him to be our Strength, our Wisdom, and our Life.

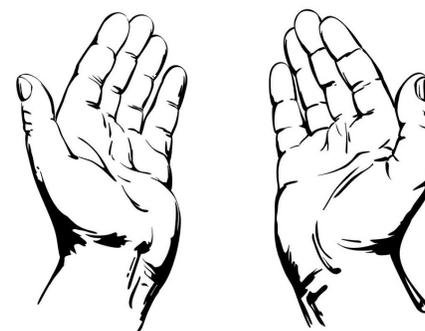
If we aren't looking to God first in life, then in death we will not look to Him, either. If our eyes are first on the world and on people, then in death we will still be looking first to the world and to people. But neither the world nor people can help us when we stand before the dread Judgment Seat of Christ. How we are in life is how we are in death, and so putting God above all things is of utmost importance.

The foregoing answers why Jesus' first word was, and still is, Repent! Without repentance we cannot receive the Kingdom of Heaven, for in order to enter into Life one must be humble, which is to say one must refuse to rely on self for anything, but cast all care upon the Lord and seek Him and His righteousness first and foremost in all things. Let God add everything else as He will, for He is trustworthy. But truly repent: hand over the ownership of your life and the reigns of your character to God. *Surrender is the essence of peace.* Let Him direct you, shape you, and heal you, for He does not save us against our will, nor heal those who deny they have a disease. Healing begins only when we are willing, willing to lay our lives down at His feet and allow Him to direct us as He will, saying with Christ, "Not My will, Father, but Thy will be done."

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Real Repentance.



Understanding the First Word of the Gospel

by

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At the very beginning of His public ministry, Jesus boldly called out, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!”

Why is repentance Jesus’ first instruction? Why is it the first word of the Gospel?

To answer this question we must first look more carefully into what the term *repentance* means. In short, from the Greek *metanoia*, repentance means a deep transformation of one’s mind. On the one hand, in many ears this could sound like “expanding” one’s consciousness, realizing one’s potential, or building a heavenly worldview with a whole host of good benefits and spiritual enlightenment. Now, this is not entirely untrue, but, as we will see, it does not adequately convey what repentance really means. On the other hand, for some the idea of repentance sounds like feeling “sorry” or bad for one’s mistakes and moral failures, a negative disposition towards sin plus a desire for moral reform, but this, too, although telling part of the story, does not adequately convey what repentance really means.

Without understanding repentance, one cannot repent, receive the Gospel, or enter into the life of the Gospel, which is the life of Jesus abiding in the heart. It is therefore spiritually imperative that we seek to get at the bottom where we can touch repentance and encounter its real meaning. It is, in a sense, frustratingly simple to understand. Thus a caution is in order: It is so simple we might walk right past it, confusing our needed understanding of it with our needful doing of it. It is too easy to mistake the understanding of a spiritual truth for a spiritual life which embodies that truth, and with repentance it is no different.

Repentance means, essentially, the inner recognition that we cannot manage our lives apart from constant recourse to and reliance on God. Repentance is the abandonment of all reliance on personal wit, strength, charm, cleverness, intelligence, good-looks, youth, willpower, knowledge, know-how, or skill. It is, in short, the abandonment of reliance on self and all that is not God. Conversely, it is the recognition

of the self’s total need for and reliance on God. It is a rejection of all reliance on self, on the world, on methods, and on man.

Note, however, the use of the word *reliance*. Reliance refers to dependency. Addiction provides a sobering illustration. An addict has a dependency on, say, alcohol or some drug or enterprise, say, gambling or pornography. In a sense, addiction is also an effective image of the nature of sin. In order to feel okay, the addict constantly submits to the authority of the addiction. The addiction has sovereignty over that person, ruling them and driving them here and there. Now, this is only the first point of discussing dependency, for awakening to the danger, and in attempting to combat their addiction, they begin to seek some other power stronger than the alcohol, drug, or what have you.

Many, in seeking to cope with and overcome their addiction, will begin by exercising willpower, but the addiction typically masters them. They may look to methods, self-help, tricks, cleverness, rationalization, or any number of other things, but the addiction remains, slowly (or perhaps more quickly) killing them. Only when they recognize and realize their fundamental inability to conquer the addiction *in their own power* do they actually begin to surrender to the power of God to heal them. They see that they cannot heal themselves, and that only God can heal them. This is the perfect image of repentance. Repentance is the recognition of the immediate, deep need to surrender to God all that one has and all that one is. Unless a person acknowledges this deep, immediate, and constant need for God and reliance on Him, there is no repentance, for this surrender is the substance of repentance. An unrepentant person will always seek any other way of avoiding surrender to Him, but only in surrender is there actual repentance.

Repentance therefore includes the deep mistrust of self as the center of one’s being, or as the source of one’s strength. No longer relying on self, but instead surrendering, repentance is the recentering of a person’s life off of self and onto God. It is letting what God says to you and about you be more true than what you say to and about yourself. It is accepting