

# A Promised Repentance

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at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.  
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Isaiah 30:22

*You will also defile the covering of your graven images of silver, And the ornament of your molded images of gold. You will throw them away as an unclean thing; You will say to them, "Get away!"*

It seems necessary to me that I explain what an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon us would first look like. To put it briefly, it would look like this text. It would be marked by a deep repentance and much humility. Often when we think about revival we mistake the results of revival for the revival itself. We think of people being saved from their sins, homes restored, and a general excitement and enthusiasm in the church and community.

But these are often the results of revival and not revival itself. Revival, whether personal or corporate, is a renewal of love for God in our hearts. It is a resuscitation of spiritual life. If a person is dragged from a pool or lake and is not breathing, first responders are going to work feverishly to revive that person. Effort to pump water out of the lungs would start; air would be breathed into the motionless body, and when the victim coughs and opens his eyes, then happily it can be said he or she was revived.

That is what revival is. It is the resuscitation of the spiritual life that is flickering dimly.

Therefore, before revival occurs the need is dire. Prior to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, spiritual life is threatened. This is no child's play. We talk about revival, we pray for revival and we act like it's nothing. It's not a big deal, it would be nice if we had it but there is no real necessity to have revival. But the word *revival* in itself means things are in a dire state and immediate attention is needed. There is no vitality. Love, joy and peace have weakened severely. Christian brothers and sisters at best tolerate one another and at worst have animosity for each other. The world has infiltrated and invaded and if the Christian is to survive, the world must be expelled, as water from a drowning victim's lungs. We need the world to be expelled from us. To need revival means that the life of God has been greatly reduced in the life of the Christian or church. Satan has overcome and gained the higher ground. The believer or group of believers have conceded the

superior position, sin is reaping its rewards, and the consequences are terrible. This is always the grim picture preceding a revival.

Sadly, many people think of revival as an extended meeting night after night where evangelistic preaching occurs and people are encouraged to respond. That is not revival. In fact, I would say it is foolish for a church to advertise a revival meeting, saying we are going to have revival such and such a date. Even if you could produce a revival, which man cannot, it is foolish to advertise revival because that church is telling the world that they are in no state to help anyone who would come. They are saying that they need help themselves. Who would come to that kind of church? It needs its own renewal.

Genuine revival is all about this—the renewing of life, the reviving of love for Jesus Christ. That is a very important need and I think it's an acute, extreme urgent need for us here.

Therefore, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon this church will not begin with singing, but with sorrow. It will not start with great joy but great contrition. It will not begin with a wonderful exaltation of our spirits but rather an extreme abasement. When this happens, then I will know God's promise has come. That's what I'm looking for. I'm not looking for souls to be saved. I'm not looking for homes to be restored. You say that's a terrible thing for a preacher to say, but dear friend, we've got our priorities out of sequence. If you intend to see many people come to Christ, you yourself must be burning with that same love that you hope them to have. If you are to see homes restored then Christ must be the Lord of your home. If you want to see your children come to know the Christ you love, then you need to love Christ for your children. And that means praying for them, travailing before God, getting your own life right. Why should you expect your children to forsake the world when they see you have not forsaken the world altogether? If God is going to fulfill His promise, this text will become a living reality, for no revival happens with repentance. The very nature of revival demands repentance. There must be a honest self-assessment, a coming to terms with where we are and a sincere confrontation that we do not love God half as much as we had thought.

What I want to do in the next few minutes is explain this repentance that is a necessary ingredient to revival and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit here. But because there are so many false notions and ideas of what repentance is, I want to begin there.

## I. WHAT CHRISTIAN REPENTANCE IS NOT

This is not an exhaustive list because there are so many odd ideas out there. Let me hit just a few.

### A. Regret.

Christian repentance is not having a regret or a sorrow that you have sinned. No doubt repentance carries grief for sin, much grief, but to say that because you're sorry for your sins you have repented is a deception spawned by demonic spirits and has infiltrated much of Christendom today. A man can be asked, "Have you accepted Jesus?" and he can respond, "Yes, I was convicted of my sins, felt sorry and asked Jesus to come into my heart." But he still lives in sin. Sorrow for sin is not sufficient enough.

I doubt there has been one murderer condemned to die and taken to the execution chamber that wasn't sorry or regretted what he had done. I'm sure there have been many thieves caught in the act who regretted that they had been caught, but when released returned to their stealing ways. Just being sorry is not sufficient and it's certainly not what repentance is.

Have you been made sorry and yet continue with your sin? Have you felt an emotional distress because you heard a specific thing you were doing wasn't pleasing to God? Maybe you were deeply disturbed and in fact you felt moved enough to come and bend the knee and humble yourself somewhat. But you comforted yourself in the fact that you felt sorry and therefore you assumed you had repented. The question is not are you sorry, but have you ceased with your sin?

### B. Acknowledgment that Progress is Needed.

I would certainly say I need progress. I acknowledge I am not so much like Jesus. I hope I am more like him than I was 27 years ago, but I have great need. If the Holy Spirit was a construction crew you would see all sorts of signs telling you that you could never trespass this way, it would always be under construction. Christian repentance is not just an acknowledgement that we can do better. It's not just an assessment that there is something in your life that needs to be dealt with. That is good, it is necessary and it's certainly a part of repentance but it's not the end thereof. All of us in this room need progress, but are we making that progress? Repentance is the act of making that progress.

### **C. A Promise to Do Better.**

Several years ago there was a movement called Promise Keepers. If you were here at the time I lampooned that name and showed the eventuality of its demise because of that name and their philosophy. A group of men getting together to promise to do better is doomed to failure. I'm not so interested in my promises to God; I'm concerned about His promises to me. I've learned a long time ago I don't keep a lot of my promises to Him. How about you?

To promise God that you'll do better and that you're going to turn over the proverbial new leaf and start tomorrow morning having your daily devotions and prayer is a fine act but it's not repentance. Because you have been convicted by God and prayed to do better as well as promised to do better is not repentance. Repentance is more than an acknowledgement that you have sinned against God. It's much more than that and it cannot stop with that.

### **D. Fear of Punishment Only.**

I've seen this hundreds and hundreds of times over the years and I do not exaggerate. I've had men and women come to my office aroused by something they heard me preach or say and conviction settled on their hearts and they were afraid. They saw eternal judgment for what it is. They saw themselves standing before God naked and bare with no excuse or reason and it was frightening to them, as it ought to be. There is nothing more frightening than to stand before holy God and the books are open and you have no hope, no Christ to cling to. To stand there alone without Jesus is the most frightening thing and it is coming. The books will one day open and the dead and the living will stand before God.

John recorded a day he saw the graves and seas give up their dead and hell was emptied as all stood before God. Nothing is more frightening than that and we should be afraid, but repentance is not an emotional tremble in your heart. It's not just fear to save yourself eternal misery.

I've seen many people who made many professions of faith out of fear of eternal judgment and they didn't truly repent. They never stay with God. Why? Because they never begin with God.

To be afraid of God is not enough. To be terrorized by His judgment is not enough. That's not repentance. I wish I could make everyone in this room today feel the terror that men and women

will feel on that day. I wish I could somehow put it in your soul right now to make you tremble, I would if I could, but I would also be wise, I pray, to know that's not repentance even if you felt that. You need much more than that.

Have you felt the fear of hell? Have you promised to do better? Have you acknowledged your sin? Have you been sorry? Very good. But have you repented?

*I don't know what repentance is. Tell me and maybe I can answer whether I've repented or not!*

Very well, let's look at what repentance is.

## II. WHAT CHRISTIAN REPENTANCE IS

There are several factors to true and biblical repentance. The first is:

### A. Brokenness.

Repentance is to be broken before yourself and before God. What is this brokenness? I would say in a general way three things about brokenness.

**1. Sorrow.** We said a moment ago it's not *just* sorrow, but sorrow is certainly involved. I don't have much hope in many dry-eyed conversions. I really don't. I'm not saying you have to weep in order to be saved, but I'm not very hopeful when I see no sorrow over sin. I say this for your good and benefit—if you cannot weep over your sins, then tell me what will move your heart? To sin against the God that loves you, who sent His Son to die for you, and not sorrow over your rebellion and your very sins that nailed Him to the cross—I don't understand how this is possible? Your heart must be very hard. I believe when a man is broken there is genuine grief. But not just sorrow.

**2. Exposure.** That's what brokenness is. You are exposed to your own sins that previously you were unaware of. If you put something in an opaque jar or vase, you don't know what's in there and neither does anyone else. But if that jar or vase is broken then what is on the inside is exposed, revealed. That is what repentance is—when the hand of God presses upon your heart so that it begins to tremble and it finally cracks, a fissure occurs and then it's broken in pieces. Then you see the secret sin, you see the thing you have hidden from your own conscience so that not

even you were aware. You had so rationalized and justified the sin so that to you it wasn't a sin. Don't we do that? We do and in many different ways.

Don't we say things to ourselves like this, *I know this probably isn't pleasing to God, but it's certainly not what **this** man is doing?* We justify it a hundred and one ways, but when repentance comes, when the gift of God comes He breaks your heart and the pets you had gathered and cared for and nurtured and kept alive, He shows them to be what they are—sins. That's what we need, that's what I need. I'm preaching from my experience lately, as I shared Wednesday night. I feel like God is once again turning my life upside down and making me to question everything. I feel as if there is nothing to stand upon but Jesus and I need God to break me because I often don't want to see my sins. I want to think that I am better than I am. I want to believe I'm more spiritual than I really am. I want God to know that I love Him more than I really do.

It's not that God doesn't know, it's us who are blind.

**3. Break the will.** Some of you have heard this story from my early days. Karen and I got married and we moved out west and pastored in an area where ranches and horses were everywhere. Everyone wore cowboy hats and boots and big buckles and they weren't drugstore cowboys, either. They were the real thing. There was a deacon in our church who was a cowboy—a foreman of a 10,000-acre ranch. He asked me if I would come and help him in my spare time and I had a lot because I didn't know what I was doing, I wasn't even saved yet so I spent a lot of time out there with Byron, who broke horses.

What's the point of breaking horses? It's to make them usable. The process was like this: a colt would grow up and once he was weaned from his mother he was let out to pasture in certain fields. For almost two years he knows complete freedom within the bounds of the pasture and fields in which he is turned loose in. He's never known a day's work, feed and grain are plentiful and every care is fulfilled. He wanders happily during the day and has no concerns at night. He can do what he wants to do.

But then about age two a man takes the horse and puts a bridle on its head. The horse has never had anything on its head before. The man is trying to teach the horse to "break to lead," to lead the horse wherever you want him to go but it's never known anything like this, so what does it do? As you're pulling, it's pulling in the opposite direction. So you go to more drastic measures,

you put a bit in its mouth. It's never had anything in its mouth other than food and now you put this harsh cold steel in on his tender gums as you try to break its will to do your will.

Then the day comes, once you've broken it to lead, you move to the saddle. You cinch it up around its waist. Never had this colt had this experience of something tied tightly around its lungs. Then you step on it and try to mount. What is the horse's response going to be? To resist, to try and throw your weight. But eventually, if the cowboy stays with the horse, it will succumb to the will of the cowboy and the horse is broken.

The analogy shouldn't have to be explained. That's what repentance is. It's the agency of the Holy Spirit working on you to make your will submissive to His. Have you repented? Then you are a submissive Christian. You don't resist God, you don't buck, you don't kick against the goads as God told Saul of Tarsus. And if you've never had the pleasure of riding a well-trained horse, it's an amazing experience. You and the horse become one and your will drives the will of that horse. That's what God wants.

One more thing about horses and I'll move on. There's a great analogy here. Once you've broken the horse to lead and to ride, if you don't ride him everyday but send him back out to pasture and a month later bring him back into ride, you're going to have to start all over again. Maybe not all over again but there will be resistance.

You may have repented of your sins and are a Christian, but my question for you today is this: is there resistance in your life? Have you been doing your will so long that when God speaks you resist His call because your will is different than His? Does His will buck against your will? Repentance is brokenness before God.

The second characteristic of biblical repentance is:

## **B. Contrition.**

Contrition is a humbling of oneself and the emptying of pride. Why should there be pride? God has broken and exposed you to see you are not half as spiritual or good as you think you are. How could there be pride? You're amazed over your own sin because you're so startled by what God has shown you. When God begins to deal with Christians about their sins there's always this

amazement and do you know what fuels that amazement? It's not the sin but that God could be so good and loving toward you in spite of the sin. You do not boast, you can't boast. You're amazed, in light of the conviction of your sin that God would still have you. You say with a broken heart, "Oh God, except for Your grace, there go I. Except for Your favor I would be in the gutter today. My life would be ruined, whether I was in a mansion or homeless on the street there would be no difference."

You're amazed that God could love you in spite of all of these things. When you're truly broken over your sins you are so startled by them that you wonder if God's mercy can cover them. Genuine repentance will often struggle with God's forgiveness. It seems too easy and your sins look too large, too sinful, too wicked, too dirty. *Can the blood still cover me? Can You still accept me, when this is what I've done? How could I still be one of Yours when I have mocked You?*

Repentance humbles us where we take no favor in ourselves at all.

Third, repentance is a,

### **C. Removal.**

I've not referred much to the text because we've dealt with some of these themes as we've moved along from verse 18 until now, but this one is certainly the most obvious evidence of repentance and it's the removal of our idols. Notice what he says again,

*You will also defile the covering of your graven images of silver, And the ornament of your molded images of gold. You will throw them away as an unclean thing; You will say to them, "Get away!"*  
(Isaiah 30:22)

Here are God's chosen ones, the elect, bowing down to idols made of gold and silver. Normally an idol of gold or silver is actually an idol carved out of wood and then overlaid with gold or silver. He is saying you are going to so despise those idols, even though they're costly—you would have to have paid an exorbitant amount to purchase it from the idol maker. It was not cheap. But it's so detestable to you and you're so grieved by the idol that you're willing to lose the money. You don't take the gold and silver off the wooden idol and keep the gold and silver, but rather you "throw them away as an unclean thing."



That's repentance!

Idolatry is anything that hinders your devotion and love for God. Anything that begins to fascinate you more than Jesus is an idol and it's sin. Even the blessings of God. How often have they tripped us up?

Someone could be listening to this message and thinking, "You know, it sounds like you think we're the scum of the earth and just a hair above hell." Not at all. Someone might say, "Well, if we need revival, why do we often experience the manifestation of the Holy Spirit when we gather?" That's the question I would like to ask you. Can you not marvel that God could be so good to us when we are in this state? Does that not make your heart melt with sorrow that even in spite of our wickedness and worldliness that God is still merciful to this church that when we gather there are still some evidences that He hasn't forsaken us and told us to get away?

That very thing ought to humble us right now. *Thank You, Lord that You have not departed from us nor forsaken us, even though You have every reason to do so. How can I **not** reject my sin? You're so much better than it.*

"Repentance is to leave  
The things we loved before,  
And show that we in earnest grieve  
By doing so no more."

Are you sorry of your sin? Do you acknowledge you need for progress? Is there a fear of God? Very good. But have you removed yourself from your sins and cast them far from you? Have you ceased from them?

Repentance is not a gradual change, but a complete break. Is your repentance up to date? I'm talking to Christians now. Dear brother, is your repentance up to date? Have you made a complete break with every sin and do you live in a spirit of repentance? What is that? A spirit of repentance is the spirit of a man or a woman who is so sensitive to God and fears sin that the moment sin comes into their life—we do sin sometimes—they immediately turn from it.

Would you tell a thief he may gradually stop stealing? What if a man or woman stood up here

today and said, “I’ve got to praise God. I’ve been stealing from my boss for three years but today I want you to know that the books show I’ve only stole half of as much as last year and if I continue on this course maybe in three years I won’t steal from him anymore.” Would we say “Bravo, a humble man, a repentant man!”? Not at all. The Bible says, “let him who stole, steal no longer,” that is the command of repentance. Stop and break it off. Now. Don’t go any further. Unload your idols. Remove them. Reject them.

Some of us have adopted an understanding of Christianity that sounds something like this—the addition of Jesus Christ without the subtraction of sin. That somehow God, Christ, and your sin can live in the same heart at the same time and still be pleased. Nothing could be further from the truth.

If you must ask what defines an idol, you are most likely guilty of idolatry. I don’t know any Christian who is sincerely saved that needs to be told what an idol is. He knows too painfully well what an idol is. He knows what it means to lessen in love for Jesus and grow in love for this world. A true believer knows what it is to elevate above God another person, a material possession, or even the blessings of God. To he or she, it doesn’t matter who or what it is, repentance is the burning desire to be free of it.

### **III. THE PROMISE OF REPENTANCE**

*“You will”*

You will detest the gold and silver. You will not consider them anything of value or anything you would want to keep. You are so hateful of that sin of idolatry that you would even defile the gold and the silver. I wish God had our finances like He deserves because then I know He would have our hearts. Isn’t it sad that we use our finances as an excuse for not serving God? *I can’t do that because I’ve got to do this— I’ve got to work overtime, I’ve got to pay my bills.* That’s so sad.

But the Bible says that when true revival comes you will throw away your idols and confess that you want them no longer.

#### **A. The Responsibility of Repentance.**

I can gather from this promise that the responsibility of repentance is mine. Can you not agree?

*“**You will** also defile the covering of your graven images of silver, And the ornament of your molded images of gold. **You will** throw them away as an unclean thing; **You will** say to them, ‘Get away!’”*

He doesn't say *God* will despise the graven images and *God* will cast away the unclean thing or say *get away*. It says, “you will.” Therefore the responsibility of repentance is yours and mine. That coincides with the Apostle John in his first epistle chapter five verse 21, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” Keep yourself away from them. That's my responsibility, yet, if you look at the text closely, this is all part and parcel of a large future promise of revival that God is making to His people. God was saying this would happen. Israel would repent. They would throw away their sins and toss them aside as unclean, detestable things, and they would tell their idols to get away from them. God's promise was to lead the children of Israel back to their homeland, which included their repentance.

How could God do that? You say, “He can foresee the future.” Yes, with amazing accuracy, but that's not what's going on here. Go back to verse 18,

“Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you;  
And therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you.  
For the LORD is a God of justice;  
Blessed are all those who wait for Him.”

Everything that follows that statement is an act of God, even their repentance.

When you became a Christian and repented of your sin it was the grace of God working in your heart. You cannot boast over any sinner and say, “Why don't you just do what I did? Why don't you just wise up and be as smart as me? Can't you see that everyone dies? Just do what I did!” Why can we not boast in our repentance? Why, to do so would be to contradict the very nature of repentance as we have already explained, but you can't boast in it because it's a grace given.

In Philippians 1:29 the Apostle Paul tells us that faith is a gift. Then in Second Thessalonians he says he's praying that God would grant them repentance. Repentance is a gift. The reason God is so certain here in our text is because behind our responsibility to repent of our sins is an Author

of repentance—God Himself.

## **B. The Author of Repentance.**

Look at Ezekiel 36:25. If anyone knows this chapter you know it's the promise of the New Covenant. It's the promise by which God and we operate and have fellowship and relationship by. The New Covenant is sealed in the blood of Jesus Christ and in that promise of the New Covenant God says this:

*“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.”*

*All your idols.* The covenant that God has made—and sealed in His blood to prove that He meant every word of this promise—is the promise to get rid of all of our idols. Not half of them, not three-quarters, not even 99 percent but every one of them. That's what God is doing. Are you cooperating with Him or are you saying, “Well, I know You're the Author of repentance and that it's a gift so I'll just wait until I get a feeling of repentance”?

If you take out a loan at the bank and the due date rolls around and you don't have the money to pay it, are you any less responsible to pay it? Not at all. You have a moral obligation to pay it.

Do we have a moral obligation to repent, to break off and remove our sins from ourselves whether we feel it or not, whether God gave grace to do it or not? Yes.

Thank God there is an Author who will grant me a spirit of repentance so that if I don't feel like repenting, if I ask for this gift He will grant to me. If I will turn and say, “Oh God, let me walk with a humble spirit where not one of my sins stands between You and I,” He will graciously respond and help me.

A true Christian doesn't fear the punishment of sin as much as he or she fears the sin itself. Did you hear me? How do you know you are receiving the spirit of the grace of repentance? You're afraid of your sin. You not only loathe the fact that you will receive the consequences of your sin, but more importantly you loathe the fact that you have sin. I believe a truly repentant person rejoices in the consequences of his sin because they are a reminder of how great the grace of God

is. They marvel and rejoice that God can forgive and hold nothing against them in spite of all of these living reminders, these consequences of their sin. They understand they deserve every consequence and probably more than what they get because they own their sin and don't excuse it.

God is the Author of our repentance, which means that God grants you a grace that somehow He produces it and you act it out. This is how gracious our God is. He doesn't leave it up to us because left up to us we would never repent, even now that we're saved. If you don't believe me, think about how many sins have you made pets out of and you have had them for years now? Without God we would never repent of one of them, but thankfully He gives a grace to repent! How do you know you're a Christian? It's real easy—do you experience grief, not over the penalty and consequences of your sin, but over the sin itself?

Oh, would God raise up a people here that hate their sin and are therefore afraid of it. God gives that. He gives that hatred and fear and you act it out. He produces it and you do it. He's the Author of it, we are the executioners of this grace so that it can be said it is our repentance.

This is what an outpouring of the Holy Spirit will look like at first. It will be a season of travailing and grieving over our sins. How long will that season last? As long as it takes to hear Jesus' knock at our door and open that door and let Him in. Jesus said to a church who needed revival, whose spiritual life was at its lowest point, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears Me and opens the door, I will come into him and I will dine with him and he will dine with Me."

How long will you grieve over your sin? As long as it takes for you to let Christ come in and believe His promise that you will have fellowship restored.

I don't want you to put on long faces and act repentant. I don't want us to go through a season here where we say, "Woe is me, I'm unclean." That's not the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not the promise of the New Covenant. I have only one standing with God, only one reason to be bold before His throne and that is the blood of Jesus Christ. Satan knows that, when are you going to know it, believe it and embrace it? May God keep His promise and fulfill it quickly. In His name I pray. Amen.