

# Repentance – The Path Less Traveled

By Kenneth L. Birks

*At that time, the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*

*Matthew 18:1-3*

As wonderful and adventurous as this path may be, many will never find it. It is a hidden path that can only found or seen by those whose eyes are enlightened. At the entrance is the cross, which we must now pick up. As we do, we're enlightened to all that exists on the path.

Jesus said, *"he who does not take up his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it."*<sup>1</sup>

There are many paths to spirituality, but there is only one path that leads to eternity in heaven with our Heavenly Father. It is the path less traveled. The only way to discover it is through Jesus Christ and adhering to the words that came from Him as He began His ministry in Galilee. He came preaching, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven, is at hand."*<sup>2</sup>

*Matthew 7:13-14 Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. <sup>14</sup>Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way that leads to life, and few find it.*

*John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*

Will you be one of the few who discover this path or will you be among those that spend their lives listening to the myriad of voices within our culture and

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 10:38-39

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 4:17

world who are screaming for your attention? We must reject these voices if we are to discover His way.

The voices of our culture and even some of those within the church are caught up in deceit and ignorance. They're totally unaware of the destruction that awaits them at the end of their path because pleasures and sensuality have numbed them. *Their god is their belly, and their glory is their shame; they have set their minds on earthly things rather than heavenly things.*<sup>3</sup> Those who listen and adhere to voices that represent pleasure, sensuality, and spiritual deception will travel down a broad path that leads to destruction and offers nothing but an illusion of what they hoped to find.

Is this the path you desire for your life or would you rather discover the invisible and spiritual path that leads to pleasures for evermore, the fullness of joy and a life of fulfillment in the purposes of God?<sup>4</sup>

Even though we have come to believe in Jesus Christ, we have choices we make every day as we partake of the blessings that are on the path.

The apostle Paul said, *"I die daily."*<sup>5</sup> Taking up the cross of Christ is an everyday thing that causes us to lose our life for the sake of the gospel.

Those who are Converted Experience Kingdom Life

Sadly, many who have come to believe in Jesus never become fully converted because of an unwillingness to die to self and lose their life for the sake of the gospel.

Jesus says, *"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."*<sup>6</sup>

What God is looking for is a lifestyle of repentance and humility because this is what it takes to keep us firmly adhering to His ways as we travel along a path that includes all things that pertain unto life and godliness.

Sadly, it took me four long years to come to a full conversion after tasting of the wonderful gift Jesus offered me. I was in Vietnam at the time when Jesus first got His hooks into me. I had a near death experience and partially committed my life to Him. It took four long years before finally surrendered

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<sup>3</sup> Philippians 3:18-19

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 16:11

<sup>5</sup> 1Corinthians 15:31

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 18:3

to the cross. During those years, I became a very lost and wandering soul trying to fill my life with adventure and drugs only to discover what I was looking for was staring me in the face the whole time. Thankfully, because of God's long-suffering and mercy towards me, I finally came to the end of myself and fully surrendered to what God wanted to do in my life. My life has been an exciting adventure in Christ ever since.

### Many Are Being Seduced and Missing the Path

In much of Christianity, there is a lack of genuine conversion and transformation in the lives of those who are attempting to follow Christ. Many are getting seduced by a Hollywood version of Christianity—a watered-down version that doesn't challenge people to put off the old nature by being crucified to the world.

The big question is, "Have we embraced the cross of Christ or have we fallen into the false teachings of the hour?"

Jesus said there would be many false teachers and prophets at the end of the age before His return. Paul warned us that many would not endure sound doctrine but would turn to false teachers with itching ears.<sup>7</sup> We must realize, Satan is out to seduce us with lies that are mixed with just enough truth to get us to bite into the deception.

In today's Christianity there is so much mixture that it's hard to discern the truth at times. We are to rightly divide the word of truth as Paul exhorted us to do.<sup>8</sup> We must know it and own it for ourselves. Otherwise, we will fall into the false teachings of the hour. You may wake up one morning and realize you are on the wrong path. Thankfully, once you fully submit your heart to the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, you will once again be led back to the path of life.

In many quarters of Christianity, the church is in the midst of similar times as to what the nation of Israel was involved in when Jeremiah prophesied the following:

*Jeremiah 5:30-31 An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power, and My people love to have it so, but what will you do in the end?*

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 24:4-5, 24, 2 Timothy 4:3-4

<sup>8</sup> 2 Timothy 2:15

Much of the church in today's Christianity has compromised the authority of God's Word in the area of repentance to draw large crowds, and the people love it so. It's a major problem. There's simply too much secular philosophy being mixed in with the kingdom message of true repentance.

### **What is True Repentance?**

Let's take a few moments to ponder what true repentance is. As we have seen, Jesus came on the scene preaching, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" He commands all of us to lay down our lives and raise the white flag of surrender to enter the kingdom of God. In other words, we must change our minds about God, sin and the Bible and yield to His authority as innocent children.<sup>9</sup> Jesus has become the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.<sup>10</sup>

True repentance is taking up the cross and following Jesus, which involves a denial of self and embracing the pain and suffering it represents. We are to look unto Jesus, the author, and finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising its shame. We are to consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest we become weary and discouraged.<sup>11</sup> It was Jesus who said to His disciples, "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*"<sup>12</sup> Is this true in your life?

### **True Repentance is to Change the Way We Think**

In the Old Testament, we find two Hebrew words describing repentance. They are *nacham* and *shub*. *Nacham* means "to be sorry or come to regret something." *Shub* means "to turn." In the New Testament, three Greek words express repentance: They are the verbs, *metanoeo*, *metamelomia*, and the noun *metanoia*, which mean "a change of mind that leads to a change of behavior."

Repentance is to change the way we think about everything. When we adjust our thoughts to God's thinking, it will produce a change in the way we act. Just as Philip the Evangelist told the Ethiopian eunuch concerning believing with our whole heart, the same applies to us.<sup>13</sup> True repentance causes us

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 18:3

<sup>10</sup> Hebrews 5:9

<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 12:2-3

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 16:24

<sup>13</sup> Acts 8:37, Romans 10:9

to turn towards God wholeheartedly. God is not interested in just a piece of our heart. He wants the whole thing. When we turn to God with our whole heart, it will change the way we think. We must always bear in mind, that God's thoughts and ways are much higher than ours.<sup>14</sup>

Years ago, when I fully surrendered to God's authority in my life, I had many strange ideas about God and who He was. Before coming out of the hippie culture, I was immersed in a lot of the ideas and thoughts about God that were popular during that generation. They included reincarnation, being one with the God consciousness, and other things such as meditation and visits from the spirit, Mescalito.

Being raised in a Bible believing family, I knew a lot of the ideas I had come in contact with during my lost years were not Biblically sound. Even though I didn't quit believing in some of the things I had picked up along the way, I made a conscious decision to place everything on a shelf, so to speak. I did not want what I was learning to have to go through the filter of my recent past and some of the philosophical ideas I had picked up. It was in shelving my old thoughts that allowed me to come to Christ as an innocent child, who was prepared to learn and be fully converted. We see this in the writings of the apostle Paul.

*Colossians 2:9 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.*

One of the reasons many are pressing the default button instead of opting for a life filled with adventure in the Holy Spirit is because of a lack of faith and understanding when it comes to repentance. Hosea the Prophet reminds us that God's people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge.<sup>15</sup> Many are rejecting knowledge by not adhering to the Word of God. As a result, they end up with too much mixture and are not becoming converted as little children. They are deceived by the watered down message of repentance coming from the pulpits of the modern church. We must all be aware of how easy it is to be cheated through subtle and ear tickling messages that are coming forth from the many voices clamoring for our attention in this critical hour of the church's destiny. Otherwise, what will we do in the end?

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<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 55:8-9

<sup>15</sup> Hosea 4:6

## **Repentance—A long Obedience in the Same Direction.**

Eugene Peterson says: *“Repentance is not an emotion. It is not feeling sorry for your sins. It is a decision. It is deciding that you have been wrong in supposing that you could manage your own life and be your own god; it is deciding that you were wrong in thinking that you had, or could get, the strength, education, and training to make it on your own; it is deciding that you have been told a pack of lies about yourself and your neighbors and your world. And it is deciding that God in Jesus Christ is telling you the truth. Repentance is a realization that what God wants from you and what you want from God are not going to be achieved by doing the same old things or thinking the same old thoughts. Repentance is a decision to follow Jesus Christ and become his pilgrim in the path of peace.”*<sup>16</sup>

## **Repentance Includes Separation From all that is Ungodly**

A major part of repentance is separating from all that is ungodly, even if it means leaving your old friends behind. Remember, repentance is coming into agreement with God and His Word so that our minds can be conformed to His thinking. We’ve been exhorted not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers by coming out from among them.

*2Corinthians 6:17 “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.”*<sup>18</sup>*“I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”*

As a young believer, I knew by hanging out with my old friends I would be back in my sin with one failure after another, so I made a conscious decision to separate from my pot smoking buddies so that I could get grounded in the faith. The reality of this thinking hit home one morning, shortly after surrendering my life to Christ. I was on my way to a college class and had picked up one of my former buddies, who was hitchhiking and happened to be toking on a joint. The next thing I knew, I was toking right along with him. I knew then that I wasn’t ready to be around my former friends. My faith wasn’t strong enough. Shortly after that, some of my buddies came by to see me and were questioning me as to why I wasn’t hanging with them any longer. I let them know I had turned my life over to Christ and was no longer interested in hanging out and smoking pot with them. After that, they no longer came around.

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<sup>16</sup> By Eugene Petersen from his book, “A Long Obedience in the Same Direction.”

Bob Dylan once wrote a line in a song, *“Gonna change my way of thinking and stop being influenced by fools.”*<sup>17</sup> Are we being influenced by fools or are we influencing the way they think?

### **Repentance Causes us to be Salt and Light**

Is there ever a time to be around our former friends? Absolutely! We are to be salt and light in their lives.<sup>18</sup> The question is: are you an influencer or an influencee when you are with them? In my case, I was still an influencee and had no business being around them. I was hiding my light, and my salt was useless. There would come a time later on when I could be the influencer rather than the influencee, but not then.

When we fail to make the break from our former friends, we get pulled in two directions—the kingdom and the world. As a result, we end up with a lot of mixtures. As a pastor, I have observed people over the years with whom I’ve had continued contact. Some are stuck in the same sins they were dealing with when I first met them. The common denominator is that they never gave up their worldly friends. They didn’t come out from among them to be separated as the Word commands.

### **Friendship with the World is Enmity with God**

James, the Lord’s brother, says it very clearly, *“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever, therefore, wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”?*<sup>19</sup>

Jesus spent a lot of time in the presence of sinners and was perfectly at peace with them. He knew fully well who He was and what His mission and purpose were—to seek and save those who are lost. Jesus had no need to compromise His testimony. Sinners were drawn to the light that emanated from Him. He was the ultimate influencer, setting at liberty the lives of those who were bound up in sin to a life of freedom and victory as they responded to the kingdom message of repentance coming forth from His life.

The beautiful thing is, as we embrace a lifestyle of repentance, we become fully converted with transformed lives. Where we once were aligned with the

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<sup>17</sup> From the album “Slow Train Coming” by Bob Dylan

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 5:13-16

<sup>19</sup> James 4:4-6

kingdom of darkness, we are now aligned with the kingdom of the Son, resulting with a similar influence upon those who are bound up in sin. We take on same characteristics found in the life of Jesus that caused Him to have such a powerful influence.

### **Repentance Includes a lifestyle of Practicing Righteousness**

A person who has truly repented and experienced conversion will have a lifestyle of practicing righteousness even though they may trip and stumble at times. They may fall several times, but each time they will immediately get back up and run into the loving arms of their faithful High Priest, who understands and sympathizes with their weaknesses.<sup>20</sup> This is the person who is truly born again and is practicing righteousness. They fall into the loving arms of their Savior, who is ready to brush them off and send them on their way without guilt or condemnation.<sup>21</sup>

*1John 3:7 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.*

A person who is not practicing righteousness does not know God nor understand what true salvation is. They have missed the path that leads to eternal life. They need to examine themselves as to whether they are in the faith and have become disqualified.<sup>22</sup>

*1John 3:10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.*

*John 7:21-23 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”<sup>22</sup> “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your Name, and done many wonders in Your name?’<sup>23</sup> “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’*

Again, it is the person who practices lawlessness, not the person who practices righteousness and occasionally stumbles to whom Jesus is speaking here. The promise of Romans 8:1 where it says, “*There is therefore*

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<sup>20</sup> Proverbs 24:16 For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity, Hebrews 4:14-16

<sup>21</sup> Romans 8:1

<sup>22</sup> 2Corinthians 13:5



*now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,*” is to those who are not practicing walking according to the flesh. What is the overall testimony of your lifestyle? Is it practicing righteousness or unrighteousness? If you are still practicing immorality or any form of sinfulness, then conversion has not taken place. You are still lost in your sins.

### **Repentance Includes Sorrowing for our Sin**

If we have come to appreciate all that Jesus went through on behalf of our sin, we will have a godly sorrow and regret for it. It was our sins that crucified Him, even though He was handed over to the Romans by the Jews for crucifixion.<sup>23</sup>

When I was a young Christian, I had a poster on my wall of Jesus hanging on the cross with His face wrenched with pain and agony. It was a constant reminder of what He had to endure on my behalf. It helped me to appreciate the forgiveness I was experiencing during a vulnerable time in my life when I was often tempted to fall back into my old lifestyle. It also helped to produce in me a godly sorrow for the way in which I had sinned against Him.

The apostle Paul writes, *“For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”*<sup>24</sup>

Godly sorrow doesn’t mean we continue to wallow in our past by reminding ourselves of our sins. However, there needs to be a time when we think soberly about how our sins put Jesus on the cross, and we sincerely ask Him for forgiveness. I have found that it is when I name my sins before God; there is more of a soberness about them that doesn’t come when I say in a cavalier sort of way, “Forgive me for my sins.”

Once I have thoroughly confessed my sins before God, I leave them and forget them as the following Scriptures lead me to believe.

*1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

*Psalms 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, so far Has He removed our transgressions from us.*

*Hebrews 10:17 Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.*

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<sup>23</sup> Romans 5:8-10, 2Corinthians 5:21

<sup>24</sup> 2Corinthians 7:10

If God has no remembrance of my sins, then I'm not going to remember them either. I'm going to forget the past and lay hold of all the good things He has in store for me.

As I conclude this chapter, I realize I have made some adamant statements concerning our salvation experience. I have chosen not to gloss over some of the more difficult passages of Scripture. We all have a responsibility to rightly divide the word of truth, especially when it comes to our salvation experience. My prayer is that you would take to heart and give serious consideration to what the Holy Spirit may be speaking to you concerning your salvation experience.

*Psalm 23:3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.*

*Proverbs 4:18 But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.*

True repentance with godly sorrow will continually open the eyes of your understanding to this adventurous path that is hidden to so many. May God bless you as you journey forward and discover the wonders and the blessings He has prepared for you along the way.

**This article was taken from a chapter in my new book**

**“The Journey – Discovering the Invisible Path”**

*To Purchase the book or learn more about it, please go to the following website: <http://booksbyken.com>*

