

FOUNDATION
Repentance: Remorse and Return
Isaiah 55:6-9

Isaiah 55:6-9~ ⁶“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; ⁷ let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. ⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

I. Introduction

Good morning, Brothers and Sisters. I am so excited to be here with you this morning. Studying the Bible is so exciting to me. To hear God’s word and His voice ... is there any greater joy. And I hope it is also exciting to you as well because that is why you are here.

Can you please turn with me to the book of Hebrews chapter 6? We are looking at our main text for our new series on FOUNDATION. And in Hebrews 6, verses 1-3, the author lays down six materials that are necessary for a firm foundation. And if you would mark this in your Bible, it would help you to remember and to grow in your faith. Hebrews 6, verses 1 to 3.

Hebrews 6:1-3~

¹ Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of ^[1]repentance from dead works and of ^[2]faith toward God, ² and of instruction about ^[3]washings, the ^[4]laying on of hands, the ^[5]resurrection of the dead, and ^[6]eternal judgment.
³ And this we will do if God permits.

And before we delve into the first of the six materials necessary for a firm foundation, let me just give a few more important introductory insights about this foundation.

1. First, these are Basic Building Blocks necessary to build towards Maturity.

These six basic building blocks are just that ... building blocks. They do not make a mature man (or a mature woman). They only help us grow toward maturity. You see that in verse 1?

Hebrews 6:1~ ¹ Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation ←→

These six building blocks are not maturity. By knowing and laying down these six foundational materials does not mean we are mature. They only aid us to become mature. The stronger our foundation is, the firmer our maturity may be ... MAY BE.

Some of us may have a good grasp of repentance and of faith and of instruction, thinking that is enough for us to be mature. But that is not maturity. Some of us can teach up a storm about these things and spend our entire Christian journey learning these things, but that does not mean that we are mature. We must go beyond the foundation to be mature.

So what does maturity look like? Well, look at the previous verses, which is the end of Hebrews chapter 5 and verses 13 and 14.

Hebrews 5:13-14~ ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk [that is, on these foundation building blocks] is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice [practice of what? The Word of Righteousness ...] to distinguish good from evil.

That is maturity. Maturity is practicing the word of righteousness so that we may distinguish good from evil. These building blocks lay the foundation to help us practice the word of righteousness.

2. Second, these foundation building blocks are the Stages of the Christian life.

This list is not just some random list put together haphazardly. This list details the stages of a person becoming a Christian and progressing to the end of his journey.

- a. First, she REPENTS ...
- b. Then she has FAITH.

Notice that repentance comes before faith in the Christian order. Some theological circle teaches that you have faith before you can repent. But that is not what the Bible teaches. (More on that later.)

- c. But after faith, comes the LAYING ON OF HANDS.
- d. Then the RESURRECTION.
- e. And finally, the ETERNAL JUDGMENT.

That is the natural order of the Christian life.

3. Third, these building blocks are listed in Couplets.

There are six of them, forming three couplets.

- a. Repentance and Faith is one couplet.
- b. Baptism and Laying on of Hands is the second couplet

- c. And Resurrection and Eternal Judgment form the last couplet

And each of these couplets has something essential to say about the totality of the Christian life. This is so important and essential, that if I may just take a few more minutes in this introductory remark to hammer this out.

- a. The First Couplet is our Conversion Life.

Both repentance and faith occur during conversion. They are the gateway into the Christian life. This couplet is where we start.

- 1) One: It is Personal.

No one can repent for you. No one can have faith for you. It is very personal. You and I must individual come to Christ.

- 2) Two: It is God-ward.

We look up. It is between God and us.

But our Christian journey does not end here. Remember that I said that these couplets are the foundational order of the Christian life? We have to move to the next couplet.

- b. The Second Couplet is our Corporate Life.

We are saved to be a part of a community ... a Christian community. Baptism and the laying on of hands are not something that we do ourselves. I cannot baptize myself and I cannot lay hands on myself.

- 1) One: It is Social.

We are baptized into a community of Christians. We are to have contact with one another, that is, the laying on of hands. We are not meant to be hermits, going off to some distant monastery and be isolated. That is not what Jesus wants for us. We are to engage the world through the Church.

- 2) Two: It is Man-ward.

We look towards each other. If we are a child of God, we are in a family. We have brothers and sisters that we are to care for, to love.

- c. The Third Couplet is our Committed Life.

This is the resurrection from the dead and eternal judgment.

1) One: It is Spiritual.

Only God can raise us up from the dead and only God has the final judgment. Our life is to God. We must not lose God in our Conversion Life and in our Corporate Life. We should never forget God as we have fun and joy in our social gathering.

2) Two: It is Forward looking.

We are to look to the future. These last two foundations are things that are yet to come. They are in the future when Jesus returns.

So what these three couplets reveal is that we move from Self, to Social, to Spiritual. All three are needed for a firm foundation.

I was out with Oz, one of our shepherds about two weeks ago. Being an introvert and a teacher, I just rather spend my time on the things of God. You know, being “spiritual” ...

- studying the Bible,
- reading books the whole day,
- praying,
- writing my devotions and journals, etc.

So as I was talking to Oz, planning events for our Small Groups to get together so that people from different Small Groups can know one another, I asked him, “Do we have to get together as a whole Church every two months? Can we just make it every quarter or so instead?”

You see, I rather spend my time in solitude and study than spending my time socially in a community.

And Oz said, “No. It’s every two months because we need it.” Okay. Every two months it is. And he is right.

We need all three couplets for a firm foundation. There are times that we need to be in our secret place in solitude to be strengthened by the Lord. But we cannot spend all our time there. We must be intentional about being a part of a Christian community that loves and cares for each other. Likewise, it is not good to always be around people and not have those moments alone with God. All three couplets are needed for a firm foundation.

II. The First Message: Repentance

Well, that was my introductory insights. Let’s move to the first on our list with the remaining time I have ... Repentance From Dead Works.

Repentance is not a popular topic today. We do not like to talk about repentance. Some churches for the most part have moved away from preaching on repentance all together. In fact, the largest church here in Houston, as well as in this nation (I think), does not talk about repentance at all. No mention of sins or any mention of the need to repent of those nasty sins.

We rather talk about the love of God or the power of God or the blessings of God. One friend mainly likes to talk about the healing of God. These things and topics are easy to talk about because they are easy to digest. But repentance? No.

We learn very quickly that if we want people to like us, if we want a big church, let's not make people feel uncomfortable by talk about repentance from our sins and from dead works. We just don't like to think that we are sinners. I chuckled when I read what one pastor wrote:

“If the biggest sinner you know is not you, then you don't know yourself very well.”

We do not want to think that we are bad. We don't like to hear it. We become defensive and angry. We get offended so easily when someone pulls back the curtain in our life to reveal the dirt that lies underneath. Every time my wife tells me that I did something wrong, I just want to run away, lock myself in my office until the annoying chatter is over.

But repentance is the first step to laying down a firm foundation. John the Baptist is a preacher of repentance. His first message to the children of Israel is to repent in Matthew chapter 3.

Matthew 3:1-2~¹ In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,
²“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

In other words, the entrance into the Kingdom of God is contingent on our willingness to repent. Jesus is also a preacher of repentance. The next chapter later in Matthew 4, Jesus comes on the scene and his first message is no different than John the Baptist. It is about repentance.

Matthew 4:17~¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

As Jesus departs and ascends into heaven, he gives his disciples the Great Commission which includes repentance.

Luke 24:47~⁴⁷ [and Jesus said to them,] ... that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

So that is what the apostles do. Inherent in the message of the Good News is the exhortation to repent. The first preaching of the Church is by Peter on the day of Pentecost when he calls on all who hear to repent.

Acts 2:38~³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist's first message is to repent. Jesus' first message is to repent. And the church's first message is to repent for Jesus' solemn words of warning still echoes in the message of the gospel.

Luke 13:5~⁵ ... I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

III. Believes and Repentance

In my younger years, I also avoided talking about repentance. I tried to remove the exhortation to repent from my gospel message. Repentance is for the Jews, I reasoned to myself and preached to others. But us, Gentiles, we do not repent. No. We believe.

I even have a strong argument for it as well. My argument goes like this. What is the one book in the entire New Testament whose main purpose is to lead us to eternal life? The Gospel of John, right?

John 20:31~³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

How many times does the word “repent”, or “repentance”, appears in the Gospel of John. ZERO. How many times does the word “believe” appears in the Gospel of John? 98 times. You see, we Gentiles do NOT need to repent to have eternal life. We Gentiles need to believe in order to have eternal life.

In fact, that is the message that Peter preaches to Cornelius, the first Gentile convert.

Acts 10:43~⁴³ [Peter said ...] To him [Jesus] all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

So we do not need to repent. We need to believe. Repentance is for the Jews. Believing is for us Gentiles. Good argument, huh? I even had someone call me a Son of Satan and stormed out of the room because I told him this.

That is until I realize later that believe is repentance. In Acts chapter 11 as Peter recounts the story of Cornelius to the Jews. The Bible says that:

Acts 11:18~¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

So believing for the Gentiles is entrance into repentance that leads to life. In other words, we must first believe that Jesus is who he says he is. Once we believe this, than we repent of our sinful attitude.

IV. Meaning of Repentance

One theologian notes that:

Repentance is such an important aspect of conversion that it is often stressed rather than saving faith, as when Christ said that there is joy in heaven among the angels over one sinner that repents (Lk 15:7)¹

Since repentance is essential to conversion and the first step of laying a firm foundation, we need to have a good grasp of what repentance is?

There are three words in the Bible that are translated as “repentance” in our English translation: one Greek word and two Hebrew words. And by putting these three words together, we have a solid understand of what repentance means. And I do not want to get too technical here. So I will just mention it in brief.

1. First, the Greek word is *Metanoia* which means “to Think afterward”.

The idea is to change your thinking about something. A lot of people think that this means to change our thinking about sin. It maybe but not necessary be about sin. You see, because the Bible says that God repents. He repents from destroying the Children of Israel at Mount Sinai. He repents from wiping out Nineveh when He saw them wearing sackcloth and sprinkled with ashes. So it is not necessary about changing out thinking concerning sin as much as it is about self ... about our action and why we do what we do.

In its biblical sense repentance refers to a deeply seated and thorough turning from self to God. It occurs when a radical turning to God takes place, an experience in which God is recognized as the most important fact of one’s existence.²

So it is a change of thinking of oneself to think about God.

2. Second, the Hebrew word is *Nacham* which means “to breathe heavily” or “to Sigh”.

The idea is to be sorry for something. In God’s case in Genesis 6, God was sorry He made man.

Genesis 6:6~ ⁶ And the LORD regretted [*nacham*] that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷ So the LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry [*nacham*] that I have made them.”

In our case, it can be sorry over our sins ... sorry over what we do to people ... sorry over wasting our life away. It is a deep regret of something.

¹ Helm, P. (1988). [Repentance](#). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 1837). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

² Palmer, C. (2003). [Repentance](#). In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 1376). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

3. Third, the Hebrew word is *Shoob* which means “to Return”.

It is to return back to God. The idea is to change direction ... to turn around. Deuteronomy 30 elaborates on the meaning of *shoob*.

Deuteronomy 30:1-6~ ¹ And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind [*shoob*] among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, ² and return [*shoob*] to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, ³ then the LORD your God will restore [*shoob*] your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again [*shoob*] from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. ⁴ If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. ⁵ And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.

So when Israel is under the curse of God because she has followed after the gods of the foreign nations, God will drive her to serve this foreign country. If in that foreign nation, Israel returns back to her sense (“call them to mind”), then God will return Israel back to her fortunes. God will also return Israel back to her land with her the rest of her people. So the idea of repentance is to return.

In our case, it is returning back to God.

Putting these three words together, repentance is 1) having a change of mind about ourselves and about God, 2) feeling sorry for our sins, namely that we have been living for ourselves and not for God, and 3) turning around or returning back to God.

Let me summarize it this way. Repentance involves three things:

1. First, a change of Mind (*metanoia*).
2. Second, a change of Emotion (*nacham*).
3. Third, a change of Will (*shoob*).

All three are needed and all three are involved. If only one or two of the three are involved in repentance, it is not true repentance.

Isaiah 55 is the best place to find that definition of repentance where the wicked forsakes his ways and the unrighteous man forsakes his thoughts. It is a turning to God and to His thoughts. That is repentance.

Isaiah 55:6-9~ ⁶ “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; ⁷ let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return [שוב, *shuwb* /*shoob*] to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. ⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my

ways, declares the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

V. Conclusion

I confess that our life is filled with so many important things that sometimes God is put last. But is it not time to put God first in our life again? The first step is to repent ... to change the way you think about yourself and the way you think about God. Return back to Him.

Our maybe your life has been spiraling downward. You know that you have been doing wrongful things that have hurt people around you and even hurt yourself. The Bible does say that our sin will find us out. There is a way out and a way to put your life back together. You cannot do it by yourself. God will have to be the One who gives you the right thinking and the right strength to put your life back together. Come to Him and repent.

We must:

1. Change the way we think about ourselves and our God.
2. Feel sorry for what we have done, how we have lived only for ourselves and not for God.
3. Return back to Him. Dedicate you life back to Him.

VI. The Blessing

Presider: May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. May the love of our Lord Jesus Christ be unto you.

Congregation: And also to you.