

"Can I Repent?"

It's common to hear people say, "Well, this is the way I am; and I can't change!" They assume people can't change their hearts or lives. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Today we're asking, "Can I repent?"

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. The Word of God gives us hope! We don't have to be trapped in a life enslaved to sin. We can find freedom from sin and be born again with a new heart and a new spirit that serves the Lord with joy and peace. We don't have to live with guilt and fear of the Judgment; we can become children of God living holy and godly lives. And that's why we turn to Scripture that corrects us and trains us in righteousness. Thanks for taking time with us today. We'd love to hear from you and want to be a part of your life each week.

Many today feel trapped by their sins and they suffer the guilt and shame of knowing sin is present in their lives. A popular doctrine suggests that people are born in sin and incapable of doing anything good or changing their hearts and lives.

That God expects all people to repent is clear in Scripture. The Lord Jesus said in Luke 13:3, "I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." Repentance is not optional; it's as necessary as faith! Paul told the pagan philosophers at Mars Hill in Acts 17:30 to 31, that "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." Repentance is required for all who wish to be saved. Faith is essential to salvation, but faith alone apart from repentance will not save. Being baptized is necessary to salvation, but baptism without repentance will not save us. We must repent.

Now this is an important study about repentance; and we offer it free! If you'd like a printed copy and live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have free materials on our website at www.searchtv.org. You can also see us on YouTube.

We'll now worship in song, read from Psalm 103:8 to 14, and explore what it means to repent and how we can repent.

Our reading today comes from Psalms 103 verses 8 to 14. And here David is expressing his great gratitude for the compassion and grace of God.

The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.
He will not always strive with us,
Nor will He keep His anger forever.
He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.
As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
Just as a father has compassion on his children,
So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.

For He Himself knows our frame;
He is mindful that we are but dust.

That's a reading from God's holy word. Let's pray together. Father we're thankful for Your compassion and grace and love for us. And that You want strive with us. Help us to be people who give ourselves fully and completely to doing Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.

I can think of no blessing so great as forgiveness and salvation. Sin leads to death, but the grace of God grants forgiveness to us. That grace was not cheap to God, and we should not cheapen it by presuming the grace of God will save us whether we repent or not. Grace is precious, but it demands response. God doesn't give us His grace to leave us where He found us. He forgives us by His grace, but His grace leads us to something better. It leads us to life, to abundant life, to newness of life, and to eternal life.

Some people have become what George Barna calls "Don'ts." They don't believe, don't think we can know God, or don't care. Well, this is really not new; many people through the years have ignored God. 2 Peter 3:3 to 9 says, "Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.

"But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

We all find ourselves struggling with sin and needing God's grace and needing to change our hearts and lives. Repentance is something that we do, but we need the help of God to do it. God's word offers us grace. And that opens the door for us to change our hearts and lives. Titus 2:11 to 14 says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." We can become different people, saved by grace, and living godly lives.

Can people repent? Well, the Bible everywhere assumes people can repent of their sins. Man does have free will. The Bible frequently speaks of "whosoever will." Revelation 22:17 says, "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost." In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus clearly reveals two paths: "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. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13 to 14). We're choosing a way to life or a way to destruction by the paths we choose and whether we follow Jesus Christ. If we choose Christ, we can repent.

Romans 6:16 to 18 says, "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, (that) you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience

leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." Now here were slaves of sin who gave themselves from the heart to obedience to do specifically what the Lord teaches. Consequently, God freed them from sin; and they became slaves of righteousness. People can change. And don't let anyone say to you people cannot change.

Ezekiel 18:21 to 23 says, "But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die. "All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live. "Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord GOD, "rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?"

Jonah tells of the widespread repentance of a heathen people, who heard the word of God and reacted appropriately. Yes, even unbelievers can become believers and repent. Jonah 3 verses 3 to 10 says: So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk. And then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.

When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, (he) laid aside his robe from him, (he) covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. "But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. "Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish." When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared (that) He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

Now if we can repent, how do we do it? Obviously, wanting to change is the first step to making a change. When people love the Lord, want to please Him, and wish they hadn't sinned, they start looking for the way to overcome their sins in their lives. When someone realizes they've sinned and realizes how their sins have caused the death of Jesus on the cross, it moves them to see how terrible sin really is.

When they take a long look at the cross and recognize the great price that Jesus paid for their sins, they begin to take sin seriously. When people realize how great a love Jesus showed in dying for their sins, they no longer think their sins are so pleasurable. Isaiah 53:5 to 6 reminds us, "But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him." Jesus bore the punishment for our sins, punishment that should have fallen on us. Love moves us to live for the Lord.

Romans 2 and verse 4 asks, "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" When people take the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience seriously, they repent! They don't presume they can go on committing sins. Romans 6:1 and 2 says, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?"

When we hear the gospel, the story of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it leads us to have the kind of faith and love that leads to a change of heart and life. Acts 26:18 says the Lord Jesus sent Paul to preach to the Gentiles, "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me." Preaching is by nature persuasive, leading us to God and to salvation. James 1:21 reminds us, "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and (the) overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."

Committing a sin and feeling like you have gotten away with it leads people to feel like they can practice that sin without fear of punishment. That is delusional. Ecclesiastes 8:11 to 13 says, "Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil. Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly. But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God." Continuing in sin can lead people to love sin more than they love God. Loving God more than evil leads to repentance. What are you choosing?

One cannot sin against God repeatedly and get away with it. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 24:48 to 51, "But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,' and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." You don't have to die lost; you can turn your heart to the Lord.

Ephesians 6:10 to 18 says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

"Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take (up) the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication." God gives us seven pieces of armor that protect us from sin: truth, righteousness, the Gospel of peace, faith, the promise of salvation, the Word of God, and prayer. Take up God's armor!

Let's pray together. Father we're thankful that You provide for us the things necessary to fight against the devil. And against those who are evil. Help us to do what is right and to love the truth and to love You and to obey Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.

The apostle Paul asked in Romans 2:4 to 8, "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and

indignation.” My friend you’re making a choice by your heart and life as to what your eternal destiny will be.

Following Christ demands that we place our faith in Him and in what He teaches. If you don’t believe what He says, you show you don’t really believe in Him. Following Christ demands repentance. When people fail to turn away from sin, hunger for righteousness, and turn to the Lord, they show they haven’t followed Christ down the narrow path. Following Christ means confessing Him before others and not hiding your faith. Following Christ means repenting and being baptized into Christ (that immersed in water) for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2 and verse 38).

And when you’re baptized God washes away your sins and causes you to be born again, giving you a new life. The old man of sin is dead, and you’re a new person united with Christ (Romans 6:3 to 7). Perhaps you have obeyed the gospel but have strayed from God and the truth, repent and return to the Lord. Perhaps you’ve stopped worshipping at church, repent and return to the Lord. And today is the day to repent.

We pray today’s study about repentance has stirred you to turn your heart to the Lord. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord’s Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now there’s also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches that are in your area at www.searchtv.org. You can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! We ask subscribe to our channel, “SearchTVMinistry.” That’s one word. And be sure to like the programs you watch; this helps spread the program. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now, don’t worry, we’re not asking for money. We’re here to help you draw close to God.

We ask that you focus your heart on God by worshipping at church. Everyone needs a church family. And I realize that some of you for health reasons cannot attend worship; so I’m speaking to those who can attend and but they haven’t been in quite some time. You need to get back to church, you need to get involved, and you need to show your faith in a public way as part of a family of people who love God. There’s probably a church of Christ near you. And if you’re looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we’ll gladly help you find one. We want to be here for you. Now we’ll be back next week, Lord willing. We like to be here every week and we like to serve you. And we ask that you keep searching God’s Word with us and tell a friend about the program. Tell that you watch and that you care about them and that you want them to watch. And as always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord’s Way.