

October 18, 2022

Dear Brother,

I approach you as a brother, as I would reckon you a believer in Christ by what I can see from your Facebook profile. I am not sure how we know each other, but we are friends on Facebook. I assume that you requested to be friends with me, as I am not sure that I am that familiar with you (or my memory is failing me as to how, which is very possible these days). I am sorry that I cannot place you or recognize you at a greater extent.

I approach you somewhat publicly, since your recent Facebook post addresses (and accuses) many in public, and your sermon summary (my words) that you posted addresses particular teachings publicly, from the pulpit, in a place where I have taught the opposite, at some level, of what you preached. (As yourself, I too was filling the pulpit, but just prior to the arrival of the pastor at the church). Here is the post in its entirety (save the picture of you in the pulpit):

It was a privilege to preach the word at _____ Baptist in _____ this morning and looking forward to being back there next week!

The sermon this morning was titled: "The Necessity of Repentance"

Many today want to remove the word "repent" from the message of the gospel and attempt to pit believing in Jesus against repentance in order to give cover to their flesh.

Here are a few verses to consider on the necessity of repentance:

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 3:19 "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,

Acts 5:31 "Him God has exalted to His right hand [to be] Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

Acts 11:18 When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."

Acts 17:30 "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,

Acts 20:21 "testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 26:20 "but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and [then] to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.

2Cor. 7:9 -10 Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. 10 For godly sorrow produces repentance [leading] to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Heb. 6:1 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary [principles] of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

2Pet. 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning [His] promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Though I commend you for your desire to set things straight, and I would assume your best intentions, I must take issue with your premise and your stated accusation. I will address these inversely.

Your Stated Accusation Regarding Motive

First, by the words you have written, you bring a grave accusation towards those that would disagree with your premise regarding their motive ~~for those that would disagree with your premise~~. Further, one is inclined to understand this accusation as the only possibility, since you list no other possibility. It is quite a blanket statement with no clarification.

I would be denying what the Scriptures clearly teach **[if I did not agree]** that some teach out of sinful motives, including boasting (2 Cor 11:12-13), a desire for personal benefit, as wolves desiring to take what they can from who they teach at great damage to the flock (Mt 7:15; Acts 20:29), and a desire to draw away followers to themselves (Acts 20:30). Some preach from envy and strife (selfish ambition) in insincerity, with a desire to inflict harm on others (Phil 1:15-16).

Furthermore, there are many warnings in Scripture to make sure that believers are alert to false teachers that bring destructive doctrines (e.g. 2 Pet 2:1; Titus 1:11) motivated by lust (2 Tim 3:6; 2 Pet 2:18), and dishonest gain (Titus 1:11).

The Scriptures are clear: People do preach wrong things and they preach with wrong motives.

However, it is neither fair nor accurate to assume that everyone who preaches something different than you may present is doing so “in order to give cover to their flesh” (i.e. lust). It just may be that there are sound Scriptural reasons for teaching so, and it is reasonable to at least acknowledge and understand these reasons, even though you may not agree with those reasons, in part or in whole.

In my own 30+ years of studying in pastoral ministry, I have avoided having many people “fill the pulpit” for just this reason – too many know too little about the Word of God. I chose reliable men from within our assembly who understood doctrine deeply and who would avoid preaching erroneous or incomplete ideas which only confuse rather than clarify the truth.

I commend your apparent zeal. I do not commend your presentation, because (from my perspective) it displays a lack of understanding of repentance (a very common problem), an absence the definition of repentance (**another common problem**), and it sets up a requirement to use the term when the Bible itself does not back up such a claim. [To be fair, I have not heard your sermon. However, I do have what you have written, and that is what all have read in your post, with the limits Facebook poses on anyone’s intended meaning.]

Issues With the Accuracy of What You Wrote

Your premise of preachers avoiding the preaching on repentance is often repeated. However, it is unwarranted, and founded on error. Though you are welcome to reject what I share (and if you find it inaccurate, you must), I encourage you to read carefully why your premise is ill-founded and inaccurate.

A List of Verses that Use the Term “Repent” or “Repentance” Does Not Prove the Necessity of Using the Term

You list ten **instances** passages in which **where** “repent” or “repentance” **is [are]** used. This demonstrates that the terms are Biblical terms that **were** used. Such a list does not demand that these terms **must** be used. Though God “commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30), nowhere does God command everyone to use the term “repent” or “repentance” when evangelizing (presenting the truths of salvation). If the term is required to be used by God (“necessity”), then by all means we must do so. However, if God Himself has not made this term used as a “necessity,” we cannot require it.

The fact that “repent” or “repentance” is not a necessary term is seen by **a-few several** observations:

1. ***The terms “repent” and “repentance” are used relatively little in the NT.*** The verb “repent” (*metanoeo*) is used only 34x in 32 verses in the entire NT, and the noun “repentance” (*metanoia*) is used only 22x in 22 verses in the entire NT. If **either** “repent” or “repentance” was a required term, then this requirement is not illustrated by its usage **in the NT**. By contrast, the verb “believe” is used 241x in the NT and the noun “belief/faith” is used 243x **in the NT**. “Believe” and “belief” are the primary terms of the NT.
2. ***Abraham believed God for righteousness.*** If repentance is a necessity (**meaning that it means something** separate and different than belief), the Bible fails to mention Abraham’s repentance. All the way back in Genesis 15:6 we are told that Abraham “believed in the LORD, and He [God] accounted it to him for righteousness.” This act of belief in the promise of God is recounted in the NT several times. My favorite passage in all the Bible is Romans 4:5, where Paul states clearly, “But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith [noun form of “believe”; belief] is counted for righteousness. This is also found throughout Romans 4, as well as in Gal 3 and James 2. **Abraham only needed to believe in God’s promises to gain the righteousness of God.**
3. ***Jesus and the Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) overwhelmingly used “believe” instead of “repent”.*** We do know that Jesus had no sin, so He was not preaching to “give cover to [His] flesh.” If the term(s) must be used, Jesus – over and over and over – violated this principle. Instead of “repent,” Jesus overwhelmingly used the term “believe.” The Gospels use “believe” 132x in 117 verses, and only use “repent” 16x. For example, in John 11:25-26, Jesus says to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who **believes** in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and **believes** in Me shall never die. Do you **believe** this?” Jesus did not tell Martha that “repenters” will never die. Jesus doesn’t ask Martha if she repents. He asks her if she believes.

4. **Jesus made it clear that believing was the *only* requirement of salvation.** There is no clearer statement anywhere in the Bible than in John 3 regarding what is “necessary” for salvation. After John 3:16, Jesus goes on to clarify in the most absolute terms that belief in Him is THE requirement for salvation: “He who **believes in Him is not condemned**; but he who **does not believe** is condemned already, **because he has not believed** in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (3:18) Is repentance necessary? Jesus does not use the term “repentance” here but makes it clear that believing in Him is THE **[only]** key to salvation.
5. **At times, Peter uses the term “believe” instead of “repent.”** Though Peter used the command “repent” in Acts 2:38 and 3:19 (both in your list), he uses it only one other time in Acts (8:22) to call the believing Simon (8:13) to repent of his wickedness of covetousness. Peter never again uses the ~~term~~ verb “repent” in Acts or in either of his epistles. He uses the term “repentance” only once in his epistles (2 Pet 3:9). Peter does use “believe” 3x in his epistles, and the noun form “faith” or “belief” 8x. Interestingly, ~~instead of “repent,”~~ in Acts 10:43 Peter uses “believe” in place of “repent,” and states that the same results come from it as “repent” in Acts 2:38 (remission of sins). He uses “repent” and “believe” interchangeably. In Act 11:17, Peter uses “believe,” not “repent,” to argue for the legitimacy of the conversion of Cornelius and the Gentiles. **Peter does not use “repent” consistently.**
6. **Acts uses “believe” in place of “repent” the majority of the time.** As you no doubt know, “repent” and “believe” are rarely used together (“repent” is combined just 1x with “believe” in Mark 1:15, and “repentance” with “believe” or “belief” only 3x in Acts 19:4, 20:21 and Hebrews 6:1). They are usually (always?) used as synonyms, not separate ideas. This is seen in Acts, where, instead of using “repent,” the action called for or described is “believe” 37x. People “believed,” rather than “repented” (though I would argue they mean essentially the same thing).
7. **Paul overwhelmingly used the term “believe” rather than “repent.”** Besides John 3, probably the clearest example of the requirement for salvation is found in Acts 16, when the Philippian jailer asks the very clear question, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul answers, not with “Repent,” but “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.” Was Paul leaving out the term “repent” to “give cover to [his] flesh?” No. Was he presenting an incomplete Gospel – one that removed the necessity of repentance? No. He said most clearly that if the jailer believed, he would be saved. In fact, the jailer’s entire household was baptized, “having believed in God” (v.34). The term repentance is not found (though if, as I would understand it, it means essentially the same thing as “believe,” then it is certainly present).

The “Repentance” Must Be Defined Prior to Making It a Necessity

You may have defined the term “repentance” in your sermon. However, it does not appear in your posting. Such a dogmatic statement that repentance is necessary (“The Necessity of Repentance”) should first be preceded by a Biblical definition of what the term means. Stating that something is necessary while not defining what that “something” means is not helpful.

What Repentance Is Not

1. **Repentance is not sorrow.** Repentance is not sorrow, as sorrow (at least in some instances) leads to repentance (2 Cor 7:9) and godly sorrow produces repentance (2 Cor 7:10). An additional observation is that the context indicates that this repentance was something done by believers, not unbelievers.
2. **Repentance is not turning from sins.** Repentance is often used with such a phrase as “repent of your sins, and ...,” but such a phrase is not to be found in Scripture. In the rare instances where “repent” is used, it is almost always used intransitively, without an object (30 out of 34 times). People are told simply to “repent,” not to “repent of something.” (A strong argument can be made that if one has to turn from sins, unless one becomes perfectly sinless, one cannot be saved. Furthermore, this creates a works salvation, based upon one’s efforts to turn from sin.) Telling people that they need to “repent of their sins” to be saved is an *extra-biblical* idea.
3. **Repentance is not a change behavior.** Though it takes repentance to change one’s behavior, repentance is not itself a changing of one’s behavior. The changing of one’s behavior is an ongoing process of being matured through the Word, after salvation, called sanctification (e.g. John 17:17 ; Eph 5:26; 1 Thes 5:23; 2 Tim 2:21).

What Repentance Is

1. ***The definition of repentance cannot contradict other clear teachings of God's Word.*** Whatever "repent" or "repentance" means, it cannot go against the clear teachings of Scripture regarding the sole response for salvation being belief. Salvation by "faith alone" is overwhelming indisputable in Scriptural evidence and is considered one of the 5 "solas."
2. ***Repentance means "to change one's mind."*** The Greek terms show just that: meta ("after", as in change) and noia (from "nous" mind). Danker Greek Lexicon defines the verb *metanoeo* as "a serious change of mind and heart about a previous point of view or course of behavior."
3. ***Repentance is used interchangeably with "belief".*** This is why these terms (noun or verb) rarely occur together. To believe in something is to change one's mind about something. One goes from believing one thing to believing in something else – thus, a change of mind has occurred. Belief focuses on one direction (believing in or on something) and assumes this change of mind, whereas repentance focuses on both changing from belief in something to something else. Believe is the dominant, prominent term throughout the Bible with regards to conversion. It is not in contrast to repentance but fits perfectly into this idea.

Calling someone to repent (a biblical idea) is empty without a context. The context of Scripture is to go from believing in something else (self-effort, self-righteousness, "dead works," other god(s), money, etc.) and to believing in what God says about our sinfulness (notice, not sins, but sinfulness – the fact that we are sinners), and in Jesus as Savior (John 3:16,18; Acts 16:30-31). Repentance is changing one's mind to the claims of God, including our sinfulness, and the substitutionary death and resurrection of Jesus.

Those that do not employ the term "repent" or "repentance" and instead use "believe" are not limited to ill-motivations as the explanation for doing so. On the contrary, I would implore you to study further before teaching further on repentance, and seek to understand the arguments as to why people see the two terms as synonymous, rather than separate steps of salvation or in presenting the Gospel.

Repentance is a biblical term. However, it must be defined biblically, and it must be preached accurately for it to be of any value. Preaching the term inaccurately only leads to confusion, especially in the realm of salvation. A poor understanding of salvation impacts a person's growth and sanctification.

I am happy to interact with you. I have taken time to write because I care about you, about those you preach to, including those at _____. My daughter and son-in-law and family are members there and serve there. I only knew about this from your Facebook posting, but I will be sharing this letter with them, as I desire them to be accurately taught. I have not talked to them as of yet, but I believe they would reject what you seem to be teaching as reflected in your post because of what they have been taught over the years.

I hope what I write is helpful to you, whether to cause you to repent of your teaching, or to cause you to deepen your understanding and stand fast.

May God bless you in your study of His Word.

Kevin Subra