

## The Necessity for Living a Repentant Life

Revelation 2:1-5

By [Lynn Downing](#)

*July 6, 2014, Evening Sermon*

We will be looking in Revelation 2. I'd like to give the reason why I chose this passage to look at in this study. Two Sunday nights ago I was listening to Pastor Reeder's study on Joel and the emphasis on the conditions that are being addressed and the need for repentance that Joel focuses on, I asked Pastor Reeder what he thought about me doing the repentance study I do at Embers to a Flame conferences. He agreed and said that I should be right up front right from the beginning and that this is what we emphasize to the churches that come to the conferences but I do want to issue a disclaimer – I am not going to do the whole thing because it's too long for the time we have for this study. I think the Lord might be up to something since we've seen in the Joel study, this morning's study with Dr. Paul House and now this evening as we take the Lord's Supper. Let's start by looking at Revelation 2. Revelation 2:1–5 says

[1] To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: "The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. [2] 'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. [3] I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. [4] But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. [5] Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.'"

After we look at verses 4 and 5 again I will give you a bit of context on this passage about the church at Ephesus, its character and what was needed. Revelation 2:4–5 says [4] But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. [5] Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first (which means to return to the love you had for Him). If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. That's a very stern warning that He gives toward the end and the call to love the Lord, the Lord's people and the lost is the nature of the

challenge and command that He gives the people in order not to have the warning that is given right after that.

If Ephesus were one of the churches in the PCA or evangelical churches in the United States, it's interesting that they were commended for what would be typical of most any solid evangelical congregation, because the commendation centers on what is Biblically right. It centers around good theology, a recognition and resistance to evil. The reason that interests me is we can be so right about some things and so wrong about the more important things. That's the reason He says here that we need to repent of what's wrong and that's what we'll emphasize beginning in a few moments here.

In my growing up years I came through a period when there was lots of liberal content developing in the denomination of which I was a part of at the time. One of the characteristics of that liberal thought was that denomination emphasized loving people and they put that in place of true, clear, Gospel preaching. They did not emphasize the need for conversion or a changed life through faith in Jesus Christ with repentance from sin. They emphasized loving people so an interesting thing happened in my life at that time. I got to the point where if I thought a church was emphasizing love that automatically meant, and this was shallow on my part, that they weren't emphasizing the Gospel. So it is all the more interesting to hear the severity with which Jesus gives the Apostle John the diagnosis that He does for the church at Ephesus, commending them for things that we would have commended ourselves for in those days of standing against the liberalization of the denominations of the time.

What does He say? He says the thing I really have against you is that you don't love Me anymore. I have already alluded to the three kinds of love that I believe are a part of that call. It is love for God, love for the people of God, and love for the lost. With that background we're going to look at the necessity and importance of repentance as it is presented here, then a definition of repentance and a description of how to go about it. Then we'll finish up with the process of both personal and corporate repentance as we call for it and anticipate it in our revitalization and fanning the flame coaching ministries.

Let's first see the important and necessity of repentance. Remember of where you have fallen, repent, and do the works you did at first. There is obviously a strong relationship between remembering and repenting. As Christians, we can't honestly examine our past without a humble willingness to repent of our past if need be. I'll show you a passage of Scripture that will help us do this in a minute. Secondly, we cannot knowledgeably repent without having Biblically analyzed ourselves under the scrutiny of the Holy Spirit through the teachable approach to the Word of God. So what then further is included in honesty and beneficially connecting to the past where repentance is concerned?

We are looking to discover that place from where we have fallen and in this passage it is identified as we have fallen out of love with the Lord. There is right doctrine, Biblical content in teaching, with lots of commendable things but loveless. There is no movement in the mind, heart or energy of the life out of worshipful, passionate, thankful love for the Lord in and of Himself for simply who He is as well as what He has done for us. Then, once we have that kind of love for Him it will pour itself through the pores of our being into our relationship with each other. When that love is where it is rightly to be it will result in our having been arrested rightly for preparatory reasons in order to represent the Gospel into the lives of the lost. Matthew 22:36–40 says

[36] “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” [37] And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. (those three things make up the entirety of your being) [38] This is the great and first commandment. [39] And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor (saved and unsaved) as yourself. [40] On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

In I Timothy Paul, in speaking to Timothy gives a clarification of our very purpose in belonging to the Lord and the very purpose in the way we conduct our ministry. I Timothy 1:5–6 says [5] The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. [6] Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion. Or to say that in the vernacular, they have wandered away into uselessness. So we need to realize from where we have fallen and this kind of love for the Lord is what is described to be the case in this passage.

Secondly, we need to comprehend the seriousness of the fall, even beyond what we have identified to this point. When a person falls out of love with the Lord and does not have an aggressive, active, careful love for fellow believers and for the lost, this failure to love God in this way opens the door to allow for destructive results in three areas – our attitudes, appetites and conduct. I believe that just about all of life, unless I’ve missed something, can be described or included in those three words and they influence each other. So failure to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength opens the door for all kinds of calamity, competing influence and disintegration of our further love for the Lord and sooner or later it will begin to make a difference in the degree to which we adhere to the Scripture in other ways.

The result of this is also that the Spirit is quenched, not so recognizably at the beginning, but increasingly so as time goes by. Our intimacy with Christ becomes none and our fruitfulness goes by the wayside – the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of ministry. What then is the definition of repentance in this passage of Scripture? It is in two parts and the first part has three parts and the second part has one part.

The first part of the repentance that is being called here is turning away from sin by faith in Christ for reconciliation to Him. I want to call your attention to Psalm 85:6. If you are familiar with that passage you'll know right away why I go to this particular passage. It is a prayer calling for revival. What is the purpose for revival? Left to ourselves, we want revival in order to improve things in our spiritual life, our church and the effect of the church in large and there is nothing wrong with that but that's not the goal listed in this particular prayer. In this particular prayer from Psalm 85:6 it says [6] Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? If we were finishing this 'will you not revive us again' we would make it about us or a benefit to us which there is not anything wrong with because there is great benefit to the people of God in the blessing that comes from Him but it's just not what the verse says.

Psalm 85:6 says [6] Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? That's different. Contained in that passage is a strong, clear implication as well as explicit instruction and that is we're drawn into intimacy with Him when we turn from sin initially and when we turn from sin again and again in our relationship with Him as people who learn to live a repentant life.

Genesis 3:8 says [8] And they (Adam and Eve) heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. What was wrong? They were not ready to rejoice in the Lord. They weren't running to Him the way they had been but now they were running from Him.

This prayer for revival from Psalm 85:6 is designed to give us an appetite not just for the benefits the Lord gives, although He is eager to give those, but the goal is that we develop an appetite for Him and not just what He can do for us. So it is for reconciliation to Him, turning away from sin by faith in Christ for reconciliation to Him and then communion with Him that is the enjoyment of being in His presence. If you love someone you want to be with them whenever you can and you want to be with them as long as you can. That is understandable and that is what is meant here when it says we are called on to engage in the kind of repentance that results in our hunger for communion with Him. I like to refer to this as an unhurried time spent in the presence of the Lord. In other words, we leave room to stay longer if it seems like that is what needs to be done.

Thirdly, it's not only reconciliation with Him and communion with Him but it's also usefulness to Him. I will come back to this more later on after I cover the second part of this repentance.

If you don't remember much from this I do hope you don't for this about the second part. That is, we may view repentance as an event which is repeatable and there is a sense in which there is nothing wrong with that, but I would ask the question of what is the Biblical essence of repentance? Or in other words, why is it that this message is called the necessity for a repentant life? What is the

culture of repentance that is called for, both by implication and explicit instruction of the Scripture?

The essence of repentance is a willingness or an eagerness for God Himself to change us any way He wants to, anytime He wants to, to any degree He wants to. That is the essence of a repentant life and wants that kind of relationship with Him so that we sense He is calling us into different levels, function, adoration and enjoyment of Him. II Chronicles 16:9 says [9] For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. None of us are blameless in practice in this life. We are made in the righteousness of God in the work of Jesus Christ when we repent of our sin initially and ask Him to be our Savior. Every time I stop and consider II Corinthians 5:21 it just stops me and I have to get used to this idea that I am the righteousness of God in Christ. That is really what is being referred to by implication in this passage in II Chronicles 16:9. It is blameless because of this righteousness we have toward Him but it's also increasingly blameless as we pursue sanctification through the active faithful use of the means of grace.

On the basis of this kind of essence of repentance, we enter the relationship with Christ with repentance from sin that is sinfulness, when we continue to repent of sins as we go from day to day and time to time in our relationship with Him. The other reason for us continuing to repent is given to us in Psalm 69:6 where it says [6] Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me, O Lord GOD of hosts; let not those who seek you be brought to dishonor through me, O God of Israel. May my life be so reflective of the nature of Christ and so characterized by this content of repentance that as people look at me they won't see anything that repels them about belonging to Christ.

Thirdly, let me take you into a bit of a process of what repentance needs to include as we practice it. I want to give you five things. We need to repent first of all very intentionally and I think one of the ways we can do that with Biblical help is to go frequently to Psalm 139:23–24 which says [23] Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! [24] And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! That's asking God to show us ourselves. He already knows. We're not asking Him to search us so He can discover. We're asking Him to search us and in affect show us to ourselves. I recommend that, that be prayed frequently, even at times when you don't see any outstanding or obvious need to do so. That might be the time that it needs to be prayed the most. So we need to repent intentionally along the lines of the instructions of that passage.

Secondly, we need to repent purposefully. What are some of the purposes? Here are some in I Peter. I Peter 4:7 says [7] *The end of all things is at hand; (We don't know when the end of the world is coming but we have frequent reminders that the end of the world comes to people one at a time every day. We recently lost a beloved staff member of this congregation, Rev. Tom Cheely. Who knows*

which of us will be here a year from now.) therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. I think the implication in the passage is effective praying and not just saying prayers. One who has a repentant heart is far more inclined toward intimacy in the Lord, enjoyment of Him and waiting in His presence than one who is not. In Matthew 26 Jesus has come back for a third time after His disciples had fallen asleep twice before when He saw them as He had gone off to pray. He said in Matthew 26:41, [41] "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." I have an aviation illustration of that which is called spatial disorientation.

You can be flying an airplane through clouds with no reference or no visible reference to the horizon and you can be going in a deadly direction and not even know it. You can even be flying upside down because your senses won't tell you. That's the purposefulness in which we repent. We repent for such understanding, such intimacy that we're not spiritually engaged in spiritual spatial disorientation. Then we repent evidentially. We repent with evidence. The illustration here is the very interesting remark John the Baptist made to the Pharisees when he was out by the Jordon River. What would you think if Pastor Reeder said from the pulpit 'You bunch of snakes!?' John the Baptist almost said the same thing. He said "You brood of vipers!" and he was speaking to the Pharisees who he knew by the power enabling of the Lord given to him at that time, that they were not out there for constructive or admirable reasons. He knew they were there to be at the right place at the right time for political reasons and to be seen. Matthew 3:7-9 says

[7] But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? [8] Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. [9] And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.'

So if there is something aside from Christ for which we are proud and upon which we lean it will give way sooner or later and will be no good to us and we'll be no good to Him as far as usefulness and effectiveness in His service.

Beyond that we need to repent willingly. There are times when we hear a subject given in a Bible study or in a sermon and we make a decision so quickly that we don't really realize that we've made a decision but we have and it's just the way the human mind works. We make this split second decision to the result that just changed our mind in the consideration. We look more like we're listening but we're not because we have decided to change the subject in our mind for the duration, until we can go and do what we want to do. When we come up against a passage of Scripture and we wished it didn't say what it did or a pastor who said something we wished he hadn't touched on that particular matter, the kind of repentance that is called for in the Word of God is a willingness no matter what the subject is.

So finally and fifthly we need to repent without taking God's forgiveness for granted. That doesn't mean we can't have confidence in the forgiveness of God. I love I John 1:9 which says [9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Let me show you a passage from Hosea 6. I didn't pick up on what is really going on here until I was helped in it by looking at a commentary by Dr. James Montgomery Boyce. Let's look at the passage and then I'll tell you what he said about it. Hosea 6:1-4 says

[1] Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. [2] After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. [3] Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.

(How does the Lord respond? He responds in a bit of a surprising way. It's almost as though the Lord has changed the subject on them but here is what He says.) [4] What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away. They presumed upon the forgiveness of God without any evidence in that whole passage of a repentant content. There is no repentance anywhere in there. There is seemingly delightful anticipation of the blessing of God but there is no repentance.

The Scripture teaches that without repentance there is no forgiveness of sin. I would rush to say that without the essence of repentance increasingly characterizing our lives, we could get to the same place as these people were when they presumed upon the forgiveness of God without actually engaging in true repentance.

In our coaching engagements we have what we call repentance Sunday. It is something that is carefully prepared for and a church called me about two years ago and said "We'd like you to come over and speak to our elders as to how we can prepare for repentance Sunday in the life of our church." So I did. They said "What do we need to do?" Here is what I outlined. You need to take a week to two weeks individually and pray Psalm 139 on a repetitious basis until you're satisfied that everything on the paper needs to be on the paper and deserves to be on the paper where your life is concerned. After you have done that and repented of those things you need to then look at yourself as an individual leader in the church and do the same thing all over again. Then for the time beyond that it would not be bad at all for you to do that as a group of leaders. Elders in the church, asking the Lord to make known to you through prayerful consideration of His Word what is there that we need to repent of as a group of elders, where our function as officers of Christ in this particular congregation. Only then can you look at the congregation and say "What is it for this church that needs to repent?"

Two Sunday nights ago when I was listening to Pastor Reeder on his study of the book of Joel and the conditions that were being addressed and the need for repentance that were being clarified, I couldn't help but think about all that I have just shared with you. Is it any wonder that in our nation, in the evangelical world, up to now, 3500 to 4000 churches a year closed their doors, and that's net closure after all church planting has been done in the course of any year and a man whose credibility I trust very well believes on the basis of his research that because of all that is going on and the caving in of various denominations of matters of morality that as many as 8000 churches could close their doors beginning in 2014.

What are we looking at here? We are looking at a thankfulness to the Lord that we can hear messages from pastors like Pastor Reeder on Joel, Nahum and that we can call ourselves to the essence of repentance, asking the Lord to change us anyway He wants to, to any degree He wants to and at any time He wants to and mean it, out of love for Him, His people and the lost. We don't want to quench the Spirit. We don't want to become useless, individually or as leaders or corporately as a congregation. We don't have to.

Do you know what I love about the doctrine of redemption? It's the "I can" that is given to us in the doctrine of redemption. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. It used to be that I couldn't say that. Before I knew the Lord I wasn't even interested in saying that but now not only am I forgiven but I have been called to intimacy with Him to enjoy Him. I have been called to Him not for just what He can do for me, but to Him to love Him, His people and the lost and to wait before Him in His presence and I can do that. We can and by the grace of God may the Holy Spirit give us through these truths in His Word a resolve, an appetite, an attitude and a conduct that gives evidence of it. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Our Father in heaven, we thank You that You have given Yourself to us in Christ. You have given Him to us. You dear Father and You dear Jesus have given us the Holy Spirit to actually live within us. You have indicated Lord Jesus that You ever live to make intercession for us and You have given us all the explanations that we need. You have given us the ability to say 'I can' to messages and challenges like this and so we pray now that in a few moments of silence that You will grant to each person reading this the ability to say to You whatever needs to be said. Take a few moments of silence now to say to the Lord what needs to be said. It could be that while you've heard this message that you realize there are some things you need to repent of and would you do that right now? Our Father in heaven, we thank You for the gift of repentance. We thank You that it comes by the working of the Holy Spirit in our minds and hearts and whatever prayers that have been begun at this point we pray that they will

continue until they are finished, if not now soon and on into the days ahead. We ask this with thanksgiving in Jesus' Name, Amen.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

**Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine***

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).