

# REPENTANCE



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# OUTLINE

- \* What is Repentance?
- \* The Awful Price of Sin
- \* Sin Will Be Exposed!
- \* A Little Leaven Leavens the Whole Lump
- \* Seven Evidences of True Repentance
- \* Worldly Versus Godly Repentance
- \* Repentance is Seen, Not Just Heard
- \* Apostasy is a Real Danger
- \* Is “Eternal Security” Scriptural?
- \* Jesus Told Us How to Know if Someone is Truly Saved
- \* Repentance is a Gift
- \* Godly Repentance
- \* Repentance Means A Change Of Heart
- \* Temptations: Our Spiritual Exams
- \* Temptations are Unique Opportunities
- \* Choices Change Destiny
- \* Everyday Choices Have Eternal Consequences
- \* God Gives Us Space to Repent For a Reason
- \* God Gave Eli Years to Repent
- \* God Wants To Reach You
- \* The Biggest Lie of All
- \* God is Serious About Repentance
- \* How Jesus Brings Us Into Lasting Repentance
- \* God’s Manifest Presence For the Truly Repentant

When erecting a building of any size or type, the most important feature of that building is its foundation. Every structure must be built on a foundation that is sufficient to bear its weight, or it is sure to collapse at some point. For this reason, much planning and work goes into the laying of a building's foundation before the rest of the construction is even started. This same principle applies to your walk with Christ as well. Once you get saved, there is a lot of work necessary in order for you to have a foundation sufficient to bear up against the constant assault you will experience from the world and from the forces of darkness. If your foundation is strong, you will stand no matter what is thrown at you. However, if it isn't strong then you will likely fall whenever trials and temptations come.

There are certain doctrines of the faith that are especially instrumental to a believer having a strong foundation in Christ. These particular beliefs are laid out by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Hebrews:

*“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, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.”* (Hebrews 6:1-2)

Notice that the very first foundational principle is repentance. Without a true understanding of repentance, what it is, and how it manifests in our lives, we will never grow into maturity or gain victory over the enemy's devices. And yet I have found that many believers really don't know what repentance means and, as a result, their spiritual foundation has a faulty slab. The evidence of not having a proper foundation in the area of repentance is that, although you struggle with guilt and shame over a certain area of sin in your life and are continually saying, “I'm sorry,” there is never any real change in your behavior. If you have a faulty slab of repentance, be sure the devil will take advantage. For this reason, we need to have a clear understanding of what repentance is, and what it is not.

### What is Repentance?

Repentance is not only the first principle in the doctrine of Christ, it is also preeminent in the preaching of the gospel. The first thing out of John the Baptist's mouth in Matthew 3:2, was, “*Repent ye.*” Jesus also started His ministry saying, “*Repent*” (See Matthew 4:17). Repentance was the disciples' message in Mark 6:12, an integral part of Jesus' last instructions in Luke 24:47, and the first words of the Church, as seen in Peter's sermon in Acts 2:38. Repentance is also mentioned seven times in the first three chapters of the book of Revelation.

The true definition of repentance is, “to feel so contrite over your sins as to change your mind about them and to decide to change your ways.” Many times, it is not sin that people change their minds about, but rather the consequence of their sins. The guy sitting in jail is truly very sorry, but he’s not sorry he robbed the bank; he’s sorry that he got caught! He doesn’t like the consequence of his action, so he decides never to rob a bank again. But, deep in his heart, he is still a thief. In contrast, repentance means to look squarely at the sin itself and to say “no” to it. Consider the following analogy:

Have you ever had an old car that started having problems and became a drain on your pocketbook? It may be that you finally decide it’s time for a new car. As soon as you make that decision, everything changes in your attitude about your present car. You find yourself becoming increasingly neglectful with it, and you become far more attentive to newer cars that you like. This is the same type of thing that takes place in your mind when you decide to repent. You make a decision, and because of that decision, everything begins to change.

Repentance is not just “being sorry.” Using the previous analogy, you may be sorry you drive an old car, but nothing changes until you make the decision to purchase a new one. How many times have you been sorry for your behavior, but it never changes? Just as you may decide to acquire a new car once your present one begins to have problems, so also it’s often not until you suffer the consequences of your sin that you hopefully will change your mind about it. We often must eat the bad fruit of our choices until we get sick of it and say, “I’m not going to do this anymore!”

### The Awful Price of Sin

*“Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet; Tell My people their transgression, And the house of Jacob their sins.” (Isaiah 58:1)*

Our problem is that we simply don’t see sin in the same way that the Lord does. If we did, we would never, never do it. We are desensitized to sin’s true nature because we are breast fed on it from our birth. As David said in Psalm 51:5, “*in sin my mother conceived me.*” Job 15:16 tells us that man, “*drinks iniquity like water!*” If we had God’s perspective, we would understand that sin, whether our own or another’s, is the source of all problems and suffering. One of the primary goals of the entire Bible is the exposing of man’s sinful nature; this is why God had Isaiah proclaim to Israel their sins. Sin is an abomination to God and diametrically opposed to His very nature.

After Adam and Eve provoked God's curse, the Bible says he made skins of animals to cover their nakedness. Until that time, never in all of creation had there been death. Imagine that first slaughter of an innocent and trusting creature! In fact, it was one that Adam had only recently named. But, God took this undeserving animal and killed it and skinned it to cover Adam and Eve's sin. This was, of course, a prototype of the price Jesus paid in shedding His blood. The slaughter of an innocent creature to atone for sin was meant to show the horror of sin.

In the same way, according to Isaiah 53:10, Christ's soul was made an offering for sin. Jesus came to drink the cup of sin in order to permanently strip it of its power in a person's life. I believe the only way you can ever really repent of your sin is to truly look at Jesus and what he did on the cross. You must fully consider the price that He paid and see that a drop in that terrible cup that He drank was your sin. Jesus took upon himself all sin, past, present, and future. And, as terrible as the physical suffering was, the real horror to Jesus is found in Habakkuk 1:13, "*You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot not look on iniquity.*" God turned his eyes away from His Son when he became sin. This was the most dreadful moment Jesus had ever known. That was the point in Psalm 22 when Jesus cried, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*" This is what Hell is - to be forsaken of God, separated from all comfort and security.

### Sin Will Be Exposed!

One of the reasons we don't look at our own sinfulness is because of what the the book of Hebrews calls "*the deceitfulness of sin*" (Hebrews 3:13). Sin is deceitful because you can act like it's not really that bad, or that somehow you can get away with it. This is a lie that has caused many to hide their sin. But God always judges sin, no matter how much we might try to cover it up. We see this truth illustrated by an event which is recorded in the book of Joshua.

*"But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the Lord's anger burned against Israel."* (Joshua 7:1)

When the children of Israel crossed over the Jordan to the land God had promised them, He commissioned them to drive out the pagan inhabitants of the land. All went well until one man, Achan, chose to disobey what God had said and took for himself cursed loot from Jericho (see Joshua 7:1). Joshua, not knowing this and without seeking the Lord first, went on to spy out Ai, the next city they were to take. When his spies returned saying that the city should fall easily, Joshua went to battle against it, but instead of the victory he expected, disaster ensued.

*“So about three thousand men went up there from the people, but they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six men, for they chased them from before the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them down on the descent; therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water.”* (Joshua 7:4-5)

Israel fell before their enemies because Achan believed that his act of disobedience was a secret that no one would ever know about. Instead, it affected the entire nation and caused the deaths of 36 men. The same is true of you when you think you can hide a sin or an indulgence. There are always consequences to sin. It will affect every part of your life: your countenance, your attitudes, and your relationships. It will rob you of your peace. Many may never experience Jesus through you because you are preoccupied with yourself or full of guilt because of this “hidden” area of sin.

Remember the fable of the “Princess and the Pea?” The princess was made very uncomfortable by something as small as a pea under her mattress. No matter how many mattresses she piled on top of that pea, she could never rid herself of the discomfort caused by its presence! In the same way, even a speck of sin affects your life, and you can never really hide it. Let’s look at what happened next to Joshua and Israel.

*“Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads. And Joshua said, “Alas, Lord God, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all--to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? ... O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies?... So the Lord said to Joshua: “Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff.”* (Joshua 7:6-11)

How amazing that God would actually tell someone to stop praying. The message is clear: don’t even bother praying if you are harboring secret sin. God will not countenance a person who seeks Him on one hand while hiding sin on the other. In the book of Isaiah, God tells His people, *“Hear the word of the Lord, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah: ‘To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me? ...When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil.’”* (see Isaiah 1:10-16) Notice that God calls His chosen people “Sodom and Gomorrah!” He basically lets them know that they have two choices:

they can be holy or filthy. Anything else is phony. There is no middle ground. This is why He tells Joshua not to even bother praying until he has dealt with the sin in their midst.

Some of the most demonized people I have encountered are people who claim to “love the Lord.” These individuals will go on and on about their relationship with Jesus, but all the while you just sense something is not right. This is often because these same people are justifying an area of sin in their lives, and you discern the phoniness. They claim to love God, and yet they are “hiding” bitterness, judgment, or some other area of sin in the tent of their lives.

*“Now Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me." (Joshua 7:19)*

Achan could not hide. Discernment was given to the spiritual leadership to ferret out the source of the sin that was affecting the nation. As Jesus said, *“Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.”* (Luke 12:3) What he thought he could get away with is now exposed before everybody! Horribly, Achan’s entire family was destroyed with him because of his sin (see Joshua 7:24-26). How many families are destroyed because a parent chooses to indulge an area of sinfulness?

The first step on the road to repentance is to bring your struggle with sin into the light. 1 John 1:9 says, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* Confessing means to bring it to the light. Jesus said, *“He who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God”* (John 3:21).

But, this is just the beginning. The thought is completed in Proverbs 28:13, which states, *“He that covers his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy.”* You must forsake your sin in addition to confessing it. Even those who are willing to confess their sins may have difficulty forsaking them when they experience temptations. The reason for this is that there is little godly sorrow leading to repentance. As we shall see, true repentance is always an outworking of godly sorrow.

### A Little Leaven Leavens the Whole Lump

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul tells the story of a sin problem that arose in the Corinthian church. A man was having an affair with a woman, probably his step-mother. In Vs. 2 Paul writes, *“You are*

*puffed up and have not rather mourned.*” What is interesting is that Paul was not rebuking the man who had the affair, but rather the Corinthian church itself. It was winking at the sin and not addressing it. Paul expressed disbelief that they would tolerate the unrepentant man in their midst.

I was once part of a charismatic Episcopal Church that was full of fire and holiness. Unfortunately, after a number of years, it began to drift from its roots, allowing an openly homosexual man to be in the church without confronting him. When I found out about this, I went to the pastor and asked him why they let him stay. The pastor said, “Brother, we just need to love him and accept him where he is.” I left a few months later, after having been there 12 years. In verse 6, Paul warns the Corinthians that, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump!” If you tolerate only a little sin, eventually it is going to spread, and that is what has happened. The Episcopal Church now has an openly homosexual Bishop.

The purity of the early Church was very much like the purity of early Israel. The early church was so pure that when a couple, Ananias and Sapphira, attempted to deceive the Church elders, they dropped dead. Needless to say, the fear of the Lord fell mightily on the Church. Scripture tells us that after this incident, “*Yet none of the rest dared join them...*” (Acts 5:13). Only a few verses later, we’re told that Peter’s very shadow healed the sick. People want the power, but they often don’t want to pay the price.

### Seven Evidences of True Repentance

*“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.”* (2 Corinthians 7:11)

In 2 Corinthians 2:6, the Corinthian church followed Paul’s admonition and excommunicated the man who was having the affair. As a result, the man repented, and Paul then exhorted the church to restore him to fellowship. Now, in referring to this incident, Paul writes some of the most powerful verses of commendation in the Bible, but, Paul does not praise the man’s repentance; instead, he praises the church’s repentance from their passive attitude toward blatant sin in their midst!

Notice that Paul makes a distinct contrast in 2 Corinthians 7:10 between godly sorrow and what he calls “the sorrow of the world.” Worldly sorrow results in regret and anxiety. It may

cause people to go to the altar, weep, and have a lot of emotion, but it never results in a genuine turning from sin. The word used by Paul for true repentance produced by godly sorrow comes from the Greek word “matanoia,” which means “to change your mind, purpose, and heart and to recover your senses.” The perfect example of this is the "Prodigal Son." After blowing his inheritance and finding himself in a pig pen, the young man “came to his senses” (see Luke. 15:17). Or, as the King James version reads, “And when he came to himself...” The literal meaning in the Greek is, “when he woke up.” Repentance means to wake up and utterly turn from sin.

In this verse, Paul lists seven evidences or manifestations of true repentance. True, godly repentance will first produce “carefulness.” In other words, you’ll begin exercising more care in your behavior. Recognizing your tendency to fall into the same hole time and time again, you’ll do all you can to avoid it. Secondly, it produces a desire to clear yourself, to see your sinful behavior eliminated from the record of your life. Third, there is indignation. The more you think about the sin you keep falling into, the madder you get about its influence over you.

The fourth manifestation is fear. The NIV translates this word as “alarm,” and the TLB reads, “anxious to be free from sin.” At this point, a true “fear of the Lord” is beginning to build in you. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil! (see Proverbs 8:13) The fifth is vehement desire, or, in some translations, eagerness. This speaks of a deep, heart-felt longing to truly, once for all, change and be free from the tyranny of your sin.

True, godly repentance starts with just being more careful, and then develops into a desire for sin to stay out of your life. Then, once you begin to get mad that you keep falling over and over, the fear of the Lord will increase and you’ll begin to get fire in your bones! The sixth evidence of repentance is zeal. Jesus said in Revelation 3:17, “Be zealous and repent.” Zeal is when vehement desire turns to fire. This is where a passion forms within you for righteousness and holiness. The seventh manifestation is revenge. Now you’re ready to go after the demons that have conspired to keep you locked in your sin. The most powerful people in ministry are people who have gotten free from demonic activity. When you’ve been in bondage in a certain area but have become truly repentant, there is a passion and revenge to cast that demon out. This is why the enemy wants to keep people lukewarm.

Some events in the life of King Saul offer us a very real and sobering illustration of the difference between worldly sorrow for sin and true, godly repentance.

## Worldly Versus Godly Repentance

*“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them...” (1 Samuel 15:2-3)*

The nation of Amalek was the first nation to attack Israel when they came out of Egypt many years before (see Exodus 17). It was God’s desire to judge Amalek through Saul, the first king of Israel. Therefore, God gave Saul a very clear and direct order to utterly destroy the Amalekites and all that they had, but it did not happen. Saul was not faithful to carry out the Lord’s wishes because he didn’t want to destroy the best of the plunder gained from the battle. He also saved alive the Amalekite king, Agag. This greatly displeased the Lord.

*“Now the word of the Lord came to Samuel, saying, ‘I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments.’ And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the Lord... Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, ‘Blessed are you of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord.’ But Samuel said, ‘What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?’ And Saul said, ‘They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.’” (1 Samuel 15:10-15)*

Saul was very quick to blame “the people” when Samuel confronted him with his failure to do the Lord’s will. However, we’re told clearly that the fault lay with both Saul and the people. Often our own kids will respond the same way. When confronted, children say, “It wasn’t me, it was him.” This tendency to place blame somewhere other than on yourself goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. When God confronted Adam with his sin, he blamed Eve, and when Eve was confronted, she blamed the snake. From that time forward, it has been man’s tendency to want to justify, rationalize, or excuse his sin.

Look at Saul’s explanation as to why he failed to complete God’s command:

*“‘Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the Lord?’ And Saul said to Samuel, ‘But I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal.’” (1 Samuel 15:19-21)*

The logic Saul uses in this passage is convoluted. He reasons that it was in order to “sacrifice to the Lord” that he did not obey the Lord. In other words, he claims to have disobeyed the Lord in order to honor the Lord! We see here in Saul the very picture of a “religious spirit.” It is the epitome of empty religion to sacrifice to the Lord, yet at the same time remain unwilling to obey Him. Let me give you an example that may hit home.

People go to church all the time to worship and praise the Lord, yet all the while their hearts are full of unforgiveness and bitterness toward others. Many times the very people that they are worshipping with are the ones that they are holding bitterness against. Jesus said *“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”* (Matthew 5:23-24) It is religion when you worship God, but refuse to obey this clear command.

*“So Samuel said: ‘Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king.’ Then Saul said to Samuel, ‘I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, please pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord.’”* (1 Samuel 15:19-27)

In response to Saul’s disobedience, Samuel gives him his famous rebuke equating disobedience with witchcraft. He told Saul that God had rejected him from being King. With his back against the wall, Saul admitted, “I’ve sinned.” If only he had stopped there! Instead, he continued to try to excuse his actions by saying that he did it because he “feared the people.” However, this wasn’t so; Saul was not a man easily intimidated by others. In fact, he was a tyrant who slaughtered 120 of the Lord’s priests because one of them had given aid to David.

*“But Samuel said to Saul, ‘I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel.’ And as Samuel turned around to go away, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore ... Then he said, ‘I have sinned; yet honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord your God. So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul worshiped the Lord.’”* (1 Samuel 15:26-27; 30-31)

Saul, as the leader of Israel, desperately wanted the credibility that Samuel could give Him before his subjects. He wanted Samuel to cover his sin so that he wouldn't lose the confidence of the people. Samuel complied, knowing that Saul would be exposed for who he really was in the end. Saul's response shows that his "repentance" was only for the sake of expediency and did not reflect a true change of heart. Saul wanted to have his religious comforts without having to face and deal with the root rebellion in his heart. Unfortunately, this is true with many believers today. They've embraced religion, but have never truly turned from the sin in their hearts.

Unless you have truly changed your mind concerning sinful habits and behaviors, you are probably going to fall when temptation comes. It's only when you hate a sin that you will be truly willing to resist it when temptation and testing arrive. Proverbs 24:16 tells us "a just man falls seven times, and rises up again." He rises again because he does not want sin to win in his life. A further look at Saul's life will show how this unrepentant attitude shows up time and again.

### Repentance is Seen, Not Just Heard

Some time after these events, Saul becomes insanely jealous and suspicious of David, in spite of the fact that David is completely loyal. Saul, as his jealous rage gets out of hand, begins to pursue David throughout the countryside of Israel in order to kill him. Finally, he unknowingly backs David into a cave and ventures into the cave unaware of David's presence. David has a chance to kill him, but instead only cuts off a portion of his robe. Let's look at Saul's response when David confronts him with the fact that he has proof of his innocence toward Saul.

*"And David said to Saul: 'Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Indeed David seeks your harm?'... Moreover, my father, see! Yes, see the corner of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the corner of your robe, and did not kill you, know and see that there is neither evil nor rebellion in my hand, and I have not sinned against you. Yet you hunt my life to take it... Therefore let the Lord be judge, and judge between you and me, and see and plead my case, and deliver me out of your hand ...' And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. Then he said to David: 'You are more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil.'"* (1 Samuel 24:1-5; 9-17)

Oh, how Saul wept when David confronted him! Unfortunately, it was only a soulful, worldly sorrow he exhibited and not a godly sorrow that led to repentance. We know this because, in spite of his tears and moving words, there was no lasting change in Saul. Only a short time after this incident, Saul begins to pursue David once again to kill him. And again, the Lord provides David with an opportunity to prove his innocence when Saul and his entire army fall

asleep. David is able to come right into the camp and capture Saul's spear and water jug. Notice Saul's response when David once again confronts him with this proof of his innocent intentions toward him:

*"Then Saul said, 'I have sinned. Return, my son David. For I will harm you no more, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Indeed I have played the fool and erred exceedingly.'" (1 Samuel 26:21)*

Does this response seem familiar? Saul had previously expressed exceeding sorrow in pursuing David, yet, here he was doing it again! What happened to Saul's repentance? It's obvious that it was merely emotion. The moment passed, and Saul remained unchanged. Being caught red-handed, he was quick to say all the right things just as he did with Samuel, but this time David was not buying it. *"And David said in his heart, 'Now I shall perish someday by the hand of Saul.'" (1 Samuel 27:21)*

By this time David knew that Saul was not going to change. There was clearly no repentance because true repentance results in a true change of behavior. I believe that a fundamental problem with the self-help "twelve-step" programs like Alcoholics Anonymous is that they offer no hope of real change. You must confess that, in spite of your success in managing not to engage in your addictive behavior, you are always a "recovering addict." This confession negates the hope that Christ offers of real deliverance from any and every kind of sin, bondage, and destructive behavior.

### Apostasy is a Real Danger

It is quite possible that Saul had now come to a place of spiritual apostasy. Scripture clearly warns that one can become so hardened against God that He will give them over to *"a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient"* (Romans 1:28). This means that someone who has walked with God in the past can become reprobate and fall away from the faith. Apostasy must be a real danger because even the Apostle Paul believed it was possible for him! Consider what he wrote to the Corinthian church:

*"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)*

The word “disqualified” that Paul uses here is a Greek word that means “reprobate.” Reprobate means “not standing the test; not approved,” and was originally used to describe metal or coins which had been adulterated. When referring to a person, it means someone who was once “in the faith,” but has since fallen away and is no longer counted among believers. These are people who have forsaken God and are no long on the road to Heaven.

Most today do not believe that it is possible for a believer to become “reprobate.” Salvation has come to be seen as being like a flu shot. Once you’ve been inoculated from the flu and you feel like you are no longer in any danger, you tend to feel more free to subject yourself to situations or to other people who might otherwise infect you. You think, “I’ve got my flu shot, so I’m safe.” Or, to use another analogy, people see salvation as being like fire insurance. They think, “No matter what I do or how I act, at least I don’t have to worry about Hell.” Many people believe their initial salvation experience means that they are insured against Hell, regardless of their subsequent obedience to God. Paul most emphatically did not believe this! Note what he writes in his letter to the Philippians:

*“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.”* (Philippians 3:8-12)

### Is “Eternal Security” Scriptural?

*“For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.”* (1 Corinthians 11: 31-32)

In the above passage, Paul again alludes to the possibility of a believer being condemned. When I was a young Christian, I was taught to believe in what was called “eternal security.” Eternal security means that once you were saved, you were going to Heaven no matter what. Holding onto this doctrine forced me to “go around” certain scriptures or try to explain them away in an awkward way.

What opened my eyes to the absolute fallacy of this belief is when my church began to go door to door, engaging in evangelism outreach. We met person after person who claimed to know

Jesus and yet was obviously living an ungodly life. Many times these “believers” would get angry at even the implication that there could be anything “less than righteous” about them. It soon became clear to me what an error it is to believe that just making a “profession of faith” at some point in your life assures you of Heaven without regard to how you live out the rest of your life.

*“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you are reprobate.”* (2 Corinthians 13:5)

Again, Paul warns believers of the danger of falling away from the faith. Over and over Paul warns believers not to presume on their walk with God. This means that just because you have walked the aisle to “get saved,” you are not now free to live like the devil and still expect to go to Heaven. Paul clearly warns how men can fall away from belief in the following passage from 2 Timothy:

*“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith.”* (2 Timothy 3:8-12)

We’re told here that reprobation occurs when your mind becomes corrupted as a result of resisting the truth. Scripture says that God will give a strong delusion to those who will not accept the truth (see 2 Thessalonians 2:10). There can come a point when someone has resisted God’s truth and ignored His voice so much that God finally says, “Enough,” and takes their conscience away. Scripture refers to these people as those who have had their “conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:2). If you have ever been burned so severely that it left a scar, you will have noticed that the scar is less sensitive than the rest of your skin because the burn has desensitized that area of your body. In the same way, you can harden your heart to the Lord to the point where your conscience becomes seared and is no longer sensitive to the Lord. This means that you can now easily do things that at one time would have grieved you and caused you to lose your peace. If you continually harden your heart against God’s pricking of your conscience, there will come a time when you will no longer feel His conviction at all.

*“To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.” (Titus 1:15-16)*

This passage describes many of the people we met as we went door-to-door to talk about Jesus. Many professed to know God, but in works they denied Him. Please understand that I’m not talking about those who struggle, fall, and seek forgiveness. No one is sin-free. I am talking about those who sin and never humble themselves to God. Reprobation occurs to those who justify and rationalize their sin so that they don’t have to repent. When a person does this long enough, they will become deceived and believe that they are going to get into Heaven regardless of how they live their lives.

### Jesus Told Us How to Know if Someone is Truly Saved

*“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. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.” (Matthew 7:13-20)*

Jesus is referring to the “fruits of the Spirit” described by Paul in Galatians, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Galatians 5:22-24)* To know who really loves Jesus comes down simply to seeing whether there is fruit in their lives. Anyone can seem like they love Jesus or have a “form of godliness.” The Bible tells us that there are many wolves in sheep’s clothes. The only way you can truly test a person’s character is to be around them over a period of time in the context of the body of Christ. That way, you see not only how they relate to you, but how they relate to others as well. The fruit of their lives, or lack thereof, can then be truly evidenced.

What is clear from looking at the life of Saul is that we are not to be fooled by a person’s words just because they may sound “spiritual.” 1 Samuel 2:3 says, *“Talk no more so very proudly; Let no arrogance come from your mouth. For the Lord is the God of knowledge; And by*

*Him actions are weighed.*” We must always look at the fruit of a person’s life to see whether or not his actions match what he says.

### Repentance is a Gift

Based on 2 Timothy 2:25, “*God perhaps will grant them repentance,*” I do believe that, in many ways, repentance is a gift. We are such fallen creatures that it is truly a gift from God that we could ever come to the point where we hate that to which we naturally gravitate. It is definitely the action of His mercy in our lives that we could ever have zeal against that to which we would ordinarily run for solace and comfort.

If we are honest, we must admit that what usually brings us to genuine repentance is the continued reaping of the consequences of our sin. This may mean that we see the lack of fruit in our lives, or it may mean that we grow bored with our lukewarm faith. Many times we won’t deal with our sin until we see the harmful way it affects others. For example, parents usually get serious about dealing with their sin when they see its damaging effect on their children. The problem is that it is easy to wait too long! Children are in many ways like wet cement; when they are young, they are very impressionable, but after a while the things they learn become a part of who they are. At that point, it is very hard to go back and change patterns in their lives. It takes a sledgehammer now instead of just a stick.

We have looked at worldly repentance as seen in the life of Saul and seen how it results only in the making of excuses, justifying of actions, and blaming of others for our failures. Let’s now consider godly repentance and how it is illustrated in the life of another Old Testament figure.

### Godly Repentance

*“Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. But he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he raised up altars for the Baals, and made wooden images; and he worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. He also built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, ‘In Jerusalem shall My name be forever’. .... Also he caused his sons to pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom; he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. He even set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, ... So Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem*

*to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel. And the Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not listen.” (2 Chronicles 33:1-10)*

Scripture says that the wickedness of Manasseh was so great that he actually did more evil than the pagan nations that preceded Israel. These were the very nations God destroyed because of their idolatry and vileness. This wicked king openly practiced Satanism, going so far as to put an idol into the very house of the Lord! It’s difficult to fully understand the heinous nature of the type of idolatry that Manasseh practiced because we have not been exposed to this kind of thing in our American culture. I did not understand either until I saw idol worship first-hand when I visited one of the largest of India’s Hindu temples.

I went to this “sacred” Hindu site with a local pastor as we traveled through the city of Madurai in South India on a visit to indigenous churches in the area. The temple could be seen from a long distance from the city because of its massive size. When I was finally able to see it closely, I was horrified. Up and down its walls for many stories were images of demon gods in all their grotesque forms. I don’t think I have ever seen anything quite so evil before or since.

This real-life Hindu temple is a living illustration of the abomination of idol worship. While the temple itself is designed in a very similar way to the ancient Hebrew temple, it is the difference between the two that is so shocking. Like the Hebrew temple, this Hindu temple has a room called the Holy of Holies where only select persons can come and worship. The Hebrew temple’s Holy of Holies contained the Ark of the Covenant, a reminder of the presence of a holy and righteous God. The pagan temple’s holy of holies contains a phallic symbol, an obscene reminder of the evil and ugliness of idolatry. This modern example might help us to grasp the magnitude of Manasseh’s sin when he dared to do a similar thing in the very temple of God in Jerusalem. But, we see something even greater than Manasseh’s sin in this story as we read a little further.

*“Therefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon. Now when he was in affliction, he implored the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God.” (2 Chronicles 33:11-13)*

This story helps us understand how much God is willing to forgive us if we are willing to truly repent of our sin. Even though God would judge the nation of Judah in future generations for this evil king’s wickedness, Manasseh himself repented. And, unlike Saul, we can see that his

repentance was real because the biblical account of Manasseh's kingship records the actual deeds that followed his profession of guilt and repentance.

*“He took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord and in Jerusalem; and he cast them out of the city. He also repaired the altar of the Lord, sacrificed peace offerings and thank offerings on it, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel.”* (2 Chronicles 33:15-16)

Manasseh's repentance was real because it bore real fruit!

How great is God's mercy to forgive someone as wicked as Manasseh! But, it is instructive to note to what degree God had to go to finally bring him to the place of repentance. Throughout Manasseh's rebellious reign, God tried to reach him and turn him from his evil by sending prophets to warn him. It was not until he was finally taken captive and led away in chains that he was willing to change. Isn't this true of so many of us? No matter how God tries to reach us, it is not until we experience great distress that we are willing to finally heed Him and turn from our sin. Romans 2:4 tells us *“the goodness of God leads you to repentance.”* But if we will not allow his goodness to sway us, then God may allow us to experience his severity. *“Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God”* (Romans 11:22)

Let's look at another example of repentance, this time from the New Testament.

#### Repentance Means A Change Of Heart

*“And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.’”* (Luke 22:31-32)

Notice that Satan asked for Peter by name. This is because Satan saw something in Peter that belonged to him and could easily be exposed by just a little “sifting” of Peter's character. I believe that scripture reveals what it was that Satan saw in Peter. Remember that when Jesus told the disciples, *“All of you will deny that you know Me this night,”* Peter had emphatically answered Jesus, *“Even if all the others deny you, I won't.”* (see Mark 14:29) Do you see the pride? Peter not only believed that he was strong, but also that he was stronger than the other disciples.

Jesus knew that this was an area in Peter that would have to be broken. He predicted that Peter would deny him three times, and it did not take long for Jesus' prophecy to be fulfilled. In fact, it took only hours for Peter to come face to face with his own weakness and cowardice.

*“And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ So Peter went out and wept bitterly.”* (Luke 22:61-62)

Can you imagine the horror Peter felt when Jesus turned to look at him? Peter, probably for the first time in his life, was confronted with how low he was truly capable of going. Seeing this, he was struck to the heart and wept.

Saul, too, wept when confronted with his sin. Even Judas showed remorse about his sin. *“Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders.”* (Matthew 27:3) Yet, neither of these men ever showed any fruit of true repentance in their actions. Saul went right back to his old ways, and Judas gave himself up to despair and suicide. So, we plainly see that emotion alone is not necessarily demonstrative of repentance.

The question, then, is how deep was Peter's remorse, and did it show evidence of genuine repentance? I believe that if we examine Peter's life after this incident, we do find such fruit. In fact, His life shows us one of the most genuine fruits of all: mercy and compassion toward others who exhibit the same weaknesses. Look at what he preaches to the Jewish community during Pentecost, just a short time after this event.

*“The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.”* (Acts 3:13-15)

Peter boldly confronts the Jews here with the fact that they denied Jesus. And yet, what had Peter done? How could Peter have the audacity to preach to these men when he had done the same thing? Let me make it clear that if preachers had to be perfect concerning what they preached, there would be no preachers at all! Thank God for the blood of Jesus! But, it should definitely cause them to preach with much more compassion when they confront sin for which they know they themselves have experienced forgiveness. This is certainly true of Peter as he

continues his sermon: “*Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers.*” (Acts 3:17)

Other people often serve as mirrors to us. Many times we can determine to what degree we are not really repentant in an area by the degree to which we judge others who have sinned in a similar way. In other words, when someone does what you are not repentant of, you tend to judge them. In the same way, we can often tell to what degree we are repentant by the degree of compassion and mercy we have for others. We have faced how weak and capable of falling we are ourselves, and so we do not judge others when they fall.

After his fall, Peter was no longer so full of himself because he now knew that his propensity for sin was as great as those he would confront in his ministry. Therefore, when he preached, people could sense the compassion of Jesus in him. Peter could now proclaim, “*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 3:19). Peter had himself repented with godly sorrow, so he now had the authority to preach repentance to others.

Now that we have seen how godly repentance from our sins differs from worldly sorrow for our sins, let's take a deeper look at just how God uses temptation in our lives and the significance our choices to resist or to yield can have.

### Temptations: Our Spiritual Exams

Every day we are faced with choices to obey God or not to obey Him. Sometimes, because most of these choices occur in the ordinary, mundane circumstances of our lives, we don't see that they potentially have eternal consequences. But, don't be fooled! These everyday choices to obey or disobey are in reality opportunities to gain ground spiritually and so come into the anointing God has for our lives. Strange as it may seem, temptations can be unique moments in the spirit where our eternal destiny is determined. James talks about this very thing in his epistle:

*“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”* (James 1:2 – 4)

It is simply not a normal human reaction to be joyful when trials and temptations come along. But, that attitude changes when we see that these times of testing and temptations are opportunities to progress spiritually. God allows them to come into our lives to see how genuine

our faith really is. You can go to school and tell your teacher about how much you love the class and how much you are learning, but your words hold no substance when you can't pass the tests!

I went to college two different times in my life. The first time was right after I graduated from high school. I was not saved at that time, so I chose a school known for its party atmosphere. I designed my day around not having to get up too early so that I could party at night. As a result, I barely passed those early semesters. I dropped out after getting saved, and it was several years before I decided to go back. When I did go back, it was because I decided I needed a degree if I was going to have any type of career.

This time, I really wanted a degree, and since I was very serious about doing well, I disciplined myself to study every day. Because of this disciplined approach, I not only graduated, but I graduated with honors. I believe my two college experiences demonstrate a principle of life. We either live without discipline, consistency, or goals and barely get by, or we decide to set goals, lay out a plan, and discipline ourselves to do what is necessary to succeed. This is the approach we must have in our Christian lives if we are going to pass our spiritual tests and grow up to become overcomers.

### Temptations are Unique Opportunities

*“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” (James 1:12)*

Let's look at temptations in another way. A moment of temptation is, in effect, a window that briefly opens up into the spirit realm. Through this window are all the things one may be praying for: revelation, understanding, anointing, refreshing, deliverance, glory, release, salvation, discernment, spiritual reality, eternal perspective, etc. If you perceive the opportunity and avail yourself of it by resisting that old enticement and making the right choice, you can often grasp what it is that you have been seeking. But, unfortunately, most miss it. In fact, the enemy tries to make sure you miss it by distracting and deceiving you so that you never see the opportunity that's there when you overcome.

The devil knows he is taking a chance when he tempts you; he knows that if you make good choices, he can lose much of his ground in your life. Have you ever played a game where you threw the dice and actually had to go back a few spaces? That's the way it is with temptations. The devil throws the dice, thinking he can make you go back a few steps, and most of the time he succeeds. But, he is gambling. If you make the right choice and resist, you actually gain ground and find yourself increasingly free from his grip.

When the devil tempts you, he is like a snake that sticks his head out of a hole to strike you. The risk he takes is that, if you are prepared, you can strike his head off in those moments when it's exposed. Because he doesn't know beforehand how you will respond, he can only guess based on past history. Satan is gambling because he knows it is always possible, regardless of his success in tripping you up in the past, that this time you may obey the Lord and so overcome him. Ironically, it is in the very moment that you most want to yield to a temptation that you can do the enemy the most damage!

*“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”* (Matthew 6:13) Have you ever wondered why the conjunction “but” is used between temptation and deliver in this verse instead of the word “and?” I believe this particular choice of words reveals this very spiritual truth that we have been discussing. Often it is in the very moment of temptation that true repentance and deliverance are found. In other words, it is through temptation that you can finally find true deliverance from evil.

The revelation in this passage is that, while temptations should never be sought out, they are unique opportunities to “put your money where your mouth is.” In fact, without temptations, you cannot grow spiritually and become an overcomer. Jesus told Peter, *“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* (Matthew 26:41) We must not seek occasions to be tempted; our flesh is weak and easily falls. But, when such occasions do come, we need to be aware that they are opportunities to overcome, gain ground, and increase in anointing. Our prayer is to be, “Lord, don't lead me to temptation, but whatever it takes, deliver me from the power of evil!”

In school, you only advance to the next grade once you've passed certain tests. Temptations are the same thing as exams. In school, you didn't ask for tests, but you prepared for them. You knew they were coming and that only by passing them would you be promoted. The point I am making is that repentance and holiness can only be proved genuine or false at the moment of temptation. Temptations are therefore exams that measure where you truly are spiritually. How you react to temptation can have far reaching results. Lets look at some examples from scripture.

#### Choices Change Destiny

*“Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, ‘See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing*

*children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.' And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes." (Genesis 16:1-4)*

When we talk about Abraham, we are talking about the man that the apostle Paul commends as, "*the Father of all who believe.*" (Romans 4:11) In spite of this exalted status, however, Abraham did not always make right choices. It was only a year before this story occurs that God had promised Abraham an heir. When the promise did not materialize in the time that they had thought it would, Sarah came up with an alternative plan. When she presented it to Abraham, he quickly agreed.

Now, let's consider the consequences of Abraham's decision to stop waiting on the Lord and to make something happen himself. It is staggering to note that, to this day, the repercussions of his choice are still reflected daily in the headlines of the world's newspapers. The birth of Ishmael, which was the result of Abraham's sin, created a race of people that has been a thorn in the side of Israel, and hence the world, ever since. Many of today's current events, including the War on Terrorism, have their roots in this one decision. Isn't it amazing that one choice, made several millennia ago, still affects the entire social, economic, and international complexion of our world today? But aren't we, like Abraham, often oblivious to the ultimate consequences of our choices?

When you look back on your life, you will undoubtedly find instances where you made certain choices that, in many ways, determined the course of the rest of your life. Often these "life directing choices" are made shortly after you leave home for the first time. An example of this from my own life occurred right after I was saved. I was in college at the time and was desperately afraid of falling back into the party lifestyle that had been such a part of my life before my conversion. So, instead of subjecting myself to it, I would go out at night and ride my bicycle around the campus for long periods of time and just sing in tongues. One night, while doing this, I overheard a couple of guys witnessing about Jesus to someone. I immediately stopped my bike and spoke with them. From there, we became friends and started a Christian coffee house. We began to witness to the other students, and over the months we helped bring revival to the campus. What is interesting about this particular sequence of events is that I can trace the very reasons why I live in Houston, why I'm in the ministry today, who I am married to, and most of the defining aspects of my life for the past 35 years to that one decision to resist the temptations of college life.

## Everyday Choices Have Eternal Consequences

Jacob's son Joseph also had one of these defining moments when he was young. His decision in a particular time of temptation affected not only the entire course of his own life, but also the lives of many others as well.

*“And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, ‘Lie with me.’ But he refused... So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her. But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside, that she caught him by his garment, saying, ‘Lie with me.’ But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.” (Genesis 39:7-13)*

Joseph's choice to do the right thing was at a great cost to him personally, but the end result was the salvation of an entire nation! His decision to say “no” to a temptation led to the events that would enable him to rescue his family from famine in Canaan. In doing so, the entire future nation of Israel was preserved! In contrast, let's look at the result of another man's choice not to resist temptation.

Amnon, the son of King David, began to “have at thing” for his half-sister Tamar. He claimed to “love” her. With the help of a friend, he set up a trap to get alone with her and rape her, after which he spitefully sent her away in shame. As we will see, the consequences of Amnon's choice to yield to his lust were to be catastrophic, not just for him, but for many others as well. When Tamar's full brother Absalom found out what happened, he gave her some advice.

*“And Absalom her brother said to her, ‘Has Amnon your brother been with you? But now hold your peace, my sister. He is your brother; do not take this thing to heart.’ So Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom's house. But when King David heard of all these things, he was very angry. And Absalom spoke to his brother Amnon neither good nor bad. For Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar.” (2 Samuel 13:20-22)*

Absalom advised Tamar to do nothing, probably because he believed that his father, King David, would administer proper justice for the crime done against her. However, although David was quite angry about Amnon's actions, he did nothing about it. David's inaction may have been because he had some unresolved issues himself when it came to lust (see 2 Samuel 11). He may have felt inadequate in dealing with these issues with his kids. But, whatever the reason, justice was never administered for Amnon's crime.

As a result, Absalom began to deeply resent not just Amnon, but his father as well. This resentment would eventually lead him to murder his brother and rebel against his father the King by attempting to usurp his crown. The result of Absalom's anger and rebellion was that the nation of Israel was divided and brought to civil war. Notice how Amnon's choice to yield to a temptation caused a nation to be divided, whereas Joseph's refusal to yield to the very same sin caused a nation to be saved? Our choices have consequences we may never be able to foresee until it is too late!

### God Gives Us Space to Repent For a Reason

*"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.'"* (Revelation 2:18-21)

There is something God does that we often don't understand and sometimes even take for granted. It is a principle that we see throughout scripture and most probably experience ourselves in our lives without ever knowing it! It is that God often gives us space to repent from our areas of indulgence and disobedience. What I mean is that God will delay His judgment of sin, sometimes for years, in hopes of our repenting. Understanding why God does this is essential in order not to take advantage of God's bountiful grace.

God is merciful. However, at times He will warn us of His impending judgment in hope that we will turn and not suffer the consequences of rebellion. In this passage, God even showed patience with the evil prophetess Jezebel. The prophet Isaiah explained the merciful heart of God by saying, "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench" (Isaiah 42:3) Unfortunately, many interpret God's patience as weakness. We may think He is some kind of a patsy, winking at our sin. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

*"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* (2 Peter 3:9) Nothing is more clear from scripture than that the fact that God judges sin. He only holds back His judgment in hope that people will come to repentance. The problem is that many people use God's withholding of immediate judgment as an excuse to keep on sinning.

*“Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God.”* (Ecclesiastes 8:11-13)

God does not want to execute His judgment against us! He is patient and long-suffering with us. Delayed judgment is His mercy to help us come to our senses. Nowhere do we see this illustrated more than in His dealings with the children of Israel. Look at these verses from the Psalms:

*“Nevertheless they flattered Him with their mouth, And they lied to Him with their tongue; For their heart was not steadfast with Him, Nor were they faithful in His covenant. But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, And did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, And did not stir up all His wrath; For He remembered that they were but flesh, A breath that passes away and does not come again. How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, And grieved Him in the desert! Yes, again and again they tempted God, And limited the Holy One of Israel.”* (Psalms 78:36-41)

Let’s look at an example of someone who took God’s space to repent for granted.

### God Gave Eli Years to Repent

*“Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord. And the priests' custom with the people was that when any man offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come with a three-pronged fleshhook in his hand while the meat was boiling. Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; and the priest would take for himself all that the fleshhook brought up. So they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who sacrificed, ‘Give meat for roasting to the priest, for he will not take boiled meat from you, but raw.’ And if the man said to him, ‘They should really burn the fat first; then you may take as much as your heart desires,’ he would then answer him, ‘No, but you must give it now; and if not, I will take it by force.’ Therefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.”* (1 Samuel 2:12-17)

Eli’s sons’ actions greatly offended the Lord. God had given specific commands about how to handle the burnt offerings (see Exodus 29:27, Leviticus 7:31). The young men’s actions, however, were unlawful and irreverent, totally disregarding God’s word. Scripture calls their sin

“great.” But, let’s examine their father Eli’s reaction when he is confronted concerning his sons’ behavior:

*“Now Eli was very old; and he heard everything his sons did to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. So he said to them, ‘Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons! For it is not a good report that I hear. You make the Lord's people transgress. If one man sins against another, God will judge him. But if a man sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him?’ Nevertheless they did not heed the voice of their father, because the Lord desired to kill them.” (1 Samuel 2:22-25)*

Eli’s response to his sons’ sin was basically, “tut tut,” and that was all. He corrected them just enough to salve his conscience, but did nothing further. He was not passionate in dealing with their sin. The same is often true with us! Dealing with your sin may be a battle, especially if the sin has become a stronghold in your life, but don’t ever give up the fight! You must make up your mind that no matter how long it takes, whatever it takes, you will oppose and resist sin.

Because of Eli’s lack of any true response to his sons’ sinful actions, God begins to ratchet up His dealings with Eli. He sends a prophet to rebuke Eli, hoping it will cause him to begin to get serious about ridding his household of this evil.

*“Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him... Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?” (1 Samuel 2:27-36)*

The prophet goes on and tells Eli in explicit detail how the judgment of God will devastate his family and destroy his heritage. Notice that God nailed Eli on the real issue that kept him from wanting to deal with the sin in his family: Eli was getting fat from eating the offerings his sons illicitly stole. He did not correct them because he wanted the meat himself. Eli’s gluttony hardened him to the word of God, so he ignored the word of the prophet, although it was clearly God that was calling him to repent. His sin blinded him to spiritual reality, so he kept going on the path toward judgment.

### God Wants To Reach You

*“Then the Lord said to Samuel: ‘Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house*

*forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them. And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever.'"* (1 Samuel 3:11-14)

God did not stop trying to reach Eli, even after he had blatantly disregarded His warning. He spoke to him once more, this time in a more unconventional way. God spoke audibly to the child Samuel about the judgment that Eli was storing up by refusing to deal with his sin. How sad that the very first words Samuel was ever to hear from the Lord were, "I am going to judge Eli." If Eli could not hear it from a prophet, God hoped he would hear it from this innocent child.

Even though God's intention to judge Eli and his entire household was clear by this time, He now does something truly remarkable. He gives Eli "space to repent" for a long, long time. It was 24 years after God spoke to Eli about the judgment that was going to come on his life before He finally brought it about. And for all of those 24 years, Eli continued to shrug off God's correction, never repenting. Year after year he ignored the clear word he had been given from God to deal with his sinful behavior. And then, finally, the day came:

*"So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who dwells between the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God... So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. Also the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died."* (1 Samuel 4:4, 10 - 11)

Just what the prophet had said years before finally came to pass! Eli's two sons died on the same day.

*"Eli was ninety-eight years old, and his eyes were so dim that he could not see. Then the man said to Eli, 'I am he who came from the battle. And I fled today from the battle line.' And he said, 'What happened, my son?' So the messenger answered and said, "'Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has been a great slaughter among the people. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead; and the ark of God has been captured.' Then it happened, when he made mention of the ark of God, that Eli fell off the seat backward by the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years."* (1 Samuel 4:15 - 18)

Eli was 98 years old when he died! God spoke his rebuke to him when he was 74. What is ironic is that Eli died of the very sin he would not give up. His weight broke his neck when he fell!

### The Biggest Lie of All

The biggest lie that you can believe is to think that somehow you can get away with living a life that is not pleasing to God. Let's look at a scripture from the New Testament that makes this point very clear:

*“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”* (Galatians 6:7-9)

The enemy's voice is always whispering to you to go ahead and indulge in sin; “after all, God will forgive you.” And, God does forgive if you repent. But, forgiveness does not necessarily deliver you from the consequences of your sin or of the demonization that may occur. An attitude of, “It's okay, God will forgive me,” is indicative of a lack of the fear of God. The fear of the Lord recognizes that you will reap what you sow. Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord (see Hebrews 12:14).

The worst experience that you can have in the universe other than Hell itself is to realize that you wasted your life. To have had a potential and not to fulfill it will be a believer's greatest sorrow, and the surest way for you to waste your life is to put off repenting. 2 John 8 says, *“Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.”*

### God is Serious About Repentance

*“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’”* (Romans 2:4-6)

I hope that I have made clear that, in spite of His long-suffering and patience, God is very serious about repentance. His gracious forbearance should never tempt us to believe that He is winking at our sin. Sin is never an option in our lives. *“The fear of the Lord is to hate*

*evil.*” (Proverbs 8:13) A hatred of evil will deliver you from more demonic problems than anything else you can do. You must hate what God hates. *“Do I not hate them, O Lord, who hate You?”* (Psalm 131:21)

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

*“He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.”* (Proverbs 28:13)

To get free from sin, you must first totally and utterly repent. This means you must do everything the Lord is telling you to do with regard to your area of sin. If it’s alcohol, then get it out of the house! If it’s the lust of the eyes, then cut off the television! You may need to humble yourself to someone and confess your sins to a real, living, breathing, human being rather than just to God alone (preferably someone who is mature in Christ, like your pastor or an elder). Whatever it may be, make every choice you know of to walk out your repentance. Go to the Lord and ask Him what you must do, and then obey. This is your part in overcoming sin.

You need Jesus to make you wise. You need His help to heed the warnings of the Holy Spirit and deal with the issues of the soul. You must give him complete freedom to do whatever He must do in your life to bring you to a place where you are willing to repent. Everyone has had areas of sin in which they felt weak and unable to overcome. God’s answer to you in your weakness is that He is strong. In your own strength, there is nothing you can do! You must invite Him to come and do whatever He must do to bring you to full and lasting repentance. Then, once you have utterly repented, the promise comes:

### How Jesus Brings Us Into Lasting Repentance

Finally, let’s look at a beautiful picture from Psalm 32 that shows us the secret of how God brings us into a place of full repentance:

*“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.”* (Psalm 32:1-2)

Never take for granted what a wonderful blessing it is that we can know for certain that our sins are forgiven. There are over a billion Muslims, and at least as many adherents of eastern philosophies and religions, who do not know that their sins are forgiven. Many of these people are doing all kinds of things to try to absolve themselves of guilt. When I was a kid, my family

took a trip to Mexico, and I still remember seeing the blood on the steps of the cathedral in Tasco where the pilgrims would kneel and appeal to Mary for forgiveness of their sins. In the Philippines, there are those who actually subject themselves to crucifixion during Easter to try to find forgiveness. It is an incredible blessing for us to know that the blood of Jesus takes away our sin.

*“When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me.”* (Psalm 32:3-4)

God wants you to respond to His still small voice and quickly turn from areas He is dealing with. However, if you resist Him, He may ratchet up His dealings with you. God’s heavy hand of conviction may actually cause physical problems if you refuse to deal with the areas He is speaking to you about. A lot of sicknesses may occur because people do not keep short accounts with Jesus. The King James Version puts it this way, *“When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.”* The “roaring” is the roaring of your conscience. The best way to avoid this roaring is simply make it your policy never to go to bed at night without a clear conscience.

Paul tells us that even those who have never been exposed to God’s explicit commandments, *“Show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness”* (Romans 2:14). Everyone has the law written on their hearts. This includes both those who have heard the gospel and those who have never heard it. We all have an inner voice telling us what is right and what is wrong. Paul goes on to tell us that this inner voice, or conscience, is always “accusing or excusing” us.

Depression is often caused because an individual has been disregarding his conscience. For this reason, depression can be a blessing, because it is a red flag in the emotions that something is not right. The danger of anti-depressant drugs is that they can allow a person to continue to live a reasonably normal life without ever having to deal with the real issues in his soul. This is a culture that bows the knee to the god of psychology! Even pastors tell their parishioners that the answer to their depression is drugs rather than looking to Jesus. The truth is that in Jesus Christ we can have, *“Our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.”* (Hebrews 10:22)

*“My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.”* (Psalm 32:4)

This is a picture of what it looks like when your spiritual life dries up as a result of disregarding the Lord’s voice of conviction. The joy of the Lord is gone, and you are no longer

like a tree planted by the waters (see Jeremiah 17:8). Instead, you are like a dried up tumbleweed. Psalm 68:6 says, *"The rebellious dwell in a dry land."*

*"I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah"* (Psalm 32:5))

After enduring the heavy hand of God and walking in a depressed, joyless Christianity, you finally send up the white flag and confess your sin unto the Lord! And, He forgives you and gives you back your peace! But, now that you are here, how can you make sure that you don't fall back into the same area of sin? I believe verse ten holds the key to overcoming sin completely.

*"Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him."* (Psalm 32:10)

The key to being free from sin is trusting in the Lord. This is a very misunderstood concept. Romans 6:14 says, *"For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."* You do not overcome sin by striving and trying in your flesh. You overcome through utter dependance on the Lord. Yes, you need self-control and discipline in your life, but what is ultimately going to overcome sin is Jesus changing your heart. He is absolutely the only one who can truly set you free. John 8:36 says, *"Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."* If you really want to be free, He will do it. To be completely honest, the main reason people don't get free is because they don't really want to be.

### God's Manifest Presence For the Truly Repentant

In conclusion, let me share something about repentance the Lord recently showed me. In John 14:21 Jesus says, *"And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."* What a glorious verse! God the Father and God the Son will be manifest to you by the power of the Holy Spirit! For years, I have tried to comprehend what it means for God to manifest Himself in a person's life. This type of manifest presence only happens to people when there is utter and thorough repentance on their part. When they are willing to take absolute, total ownership for their sin without any blame or judgment of others, then the Lord delights in revealing Himself.

When God sees that you are truly repentant, He will often give you a space of time to see if you continue in the repentance. Once He sees that repentance has become a way of life, He then walks into the holy room that is your spirit. The King Himself, arrayed in royal purple, steps into the spirit of your life! You will then begin to sense the presence of Jesus and the glory of God

around you. You'll see the heavens opened up and the signs and wonders of the Kingdom begin to occur.

But, the Lord will not manifest Himself in this way lightly. The thought I had was, "fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me." He is not going to step into your spirit and manifest His presence only for you to lightly and frivolously step back into the flesh. The King will not allow you to catch glimpses of His majesty and then revert to your old, rebellious ways.

In essence, the Lord says to us, "I will come into any house where I know I am accepted, respected, honored and revered, any house where I can be at peace and know unclean spirits will not be easily allowed in." What God is looking for is not a one-time instance of repentance, but a lifestyle of brokenness. He wants to see the doors firmly shut to sin in those areas where you once cavalierly indulged. Until He is sure that this has occurred, His manifest presence won't come. Jesus will remain in the shadows of your life.

God wants us to abhor evil and cling to that which is good. "*You love righteousness and hate wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.*" (Psalm 45:7) This is how Jesus lived on the earth. He gave no place to the devil. "*I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.*" (John 14:30) As a result, Jesus had a secret place with the Father. He closed his eyes and he was in His presence! He was so intimate with the Father that he could walk out on the water and not be concerned about sinking. Or, the waves could be breaking over the boat, and he would calmly ask his disciples, "What are you worried about?" He stayed clearly in the presence of his Father.

This is the incentive for us to walk a repentant life! The enemy of our soul wants us to believe that we can have it both ways, that we can play around with a little of the world, thinking, "God will forgive." He does, but you will never experience the manifest presence with such an attitude. Your Christian life will be like a roller coaster, up and down. Sometimes you'll see the glory, but most of the time you'll be in the valley. This is not what the Lord wants. He has called us to live in heavenly places.(see Ephesians 1:20). How do you do that? Repentance. And the incentive for repentance is that "*Your eyes will see the King in His beauty!*" (Isaiah 33:17)

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