

INDISPENSABLE INGREDIENT #1 FOR TRANSFORMATION—REPENTANCE

Well, here we are—**the ninth** sermon in a series I've rather *lightheartedly* entitled: "Are You Going to **Thrive**—or Merely **Survive**—in 2025? I'm not going to review **all eight** previous sermons for you, but I do want to remind you that we **started off** the year by looking at Jesus' words in **John 10:10** "I am come that they might have **life**, and that they might have it more **abundantly**."

Do all of God's children **live the abundant life** that Jesus came to give them? **Obviously not!** **Why** not? Because they put too much effort into changing **their circumstances**—and not enough effort into **changing themselves!**

God **wants us** to change, doesn't He? His **desire and goal** for each of His children is that we become **more and more like Jesus!** **How** do we do that? How **do we become** more Christ-like?

--We "get it" that we cannot **save ourselves**—that is God's doing!

--And we "get it" that we cannot **glorify ourselves**—meaning make our bodies fit for heaven! That is also God's doing.

--What we "don't get"—or at least have a hard time "getting"—is that we can't **make ourselves** be like Jesus—that is God's doing, too! But we can't just "stare out the window and expect our garden to plant itself"—and we can't just "sit in the canoe and do nothing."

--God expects us to **do something**; we have a role in **growing** as a Christian and "**living** the Christian life." So what is **our part**—what does God expect you and I **to do**—in order to experience **actual change and growth** in our lives?

First, we know from II Corinthians 3:18 that when we **take in** the Word of God, the Holy Spirit **changes us**. **II Corinthians 3:18** "But we all, with open face **beholding as in a glass** the glory of the Lord, **are changed** into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

But...it is **not enough to just take** in God's Word—we also need to **obey it!**

Second, God wants us to **consider our sin nature as already being crucified** with Jesus—even though we still experience its presence! How are we to "treat" our sin nature? **Don't feed the dragon**, right?

Count **it** as crucified...and **us** as crucified...and **die to self** so we can live for Christ!

And last week, we looked at the Put-off/Put-in/and Put-on principle found in Ephesians 4:22-24. We are to **put-off** our old manner of life...and **put-in** God's Word so our mind can be renewed...and **put-on** a new way of living. In practical terms, this is the way **sinful habits** from our past—and present—are broken.

But God desires **heart change**—not just **behavior change!** We noted that in **the two examples** that immediately follow the "put-off/put-on" principle found in Ephesians 4. God doesn't want **liars** just to **stop lying**—He wants to transform them into **truth-tellers!**

And—in the words of Jay Adams—God doesn't just want someone who steals to be "a thief between jobs"—He wants them to be transformed into people who **work** so they **can give** to meet the needs of others!

This morning, we are going to begin to look at **the ingredients necessary** for heart change. God does **the changing**, but there are certain **attitudes we need to have** in order for Him to change us. It should come as no surprise to learn that they are the same **attitudes**—the same **ingredients**—required for us **to be saved** in the first place! What are those attitudes? There are several, but the top two in my mind are **repentance and faith!** As you already know from the bulletin—and your sermon outline—we are only going to look at **repentance** this morning.

Please take your Bibles and turn to Matthew 3. First, let's consider...

1. A definition of repentance

Notice what it says in Mt 3:1-2. Now drop down to verses 7-9.

Repentance in vs 8 comes from the Greek word "met-an'-oy-ah". It literally means "to change one's mind."

Bible Hub gives the following definition: “It embraces both a recognition of sin and sorrow for it and hearty amendment, the tokens and effects of which are good deeds.” It also “refers to a transformative change of heart, especially a spiritual conversion.” (BibleHub; Strong’s 3341).

To recap: It is a *recognition* of sin...with *sorrow* for sin...and a desire to *turn from sin* and *live for God*. We certainly see John the Baptist “getting after” the Pharisees and Sadducees. Why? He didn’t want them coming to him and *confessing their sins*—then *being baptized*—then *continuing* in their sins!

‘Bring forth fruit—bring some proof—that you really have a desire to turn from your sins—and to God!’

Before we move on, I just want to make some quick comments about *John’s baptism*. Being baptized by John didn’t *wash anyone’s sins away*—just like being baptized now doesn’t *wash anyone’s sins away*.

How was *John’s* baptism different from the *Christian* baptism we do now?

--Of *John’s baptism*, “GotQuestions.org” puts it like this: “Being baptized by John demonstrated a recognition of one’s sin, a desire for spiritual cleansing, and a commitment to follow God’s law in anticipation of the Messiah’s arrival.”

--*Christian baptism*—the kind we do now—takes place *after a person repents* of their sin, understands their need of forgiveness, and puts *their faith and trust in what Jesus did* on the cross for their forgiveness. It is to let people know that they are *identifying themselves* with their Savior—and indicating a *desire to walk in the newness of life*.

2. The declaration that repentance is required for salvation

How do we know repentance is required for salvation? Because Jesus said so!

--Notice what it says in Mt 4:17.

--Now let’s look at Mt 9:12-13.

Here are a couple more:

--**Lk 13:3, 5** “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye **repent**, ye shall all likewise perish.”

--Peter made a similar statement in a sermon he preached as recorded in **Acts 3:19** “**Repent** ye therefore, and **be converted**, that your sins may be blotted out...”

--And Paul brought up both repentance and faith in his parting words to the Ephesian elders in **Acts 20:21** “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, **repentance** toward God, and **faith** toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

I don’t think anyone who knows the Bible would argue against the necessity of repentance in order for a person to become a child of God. But what about for *sanctification*? Is *repentance necessary* for us *to grow* in Christ-likeness? It sure is—and probably more necessary than many of us realize! In the book “How People Change,” authors Lane and Tripp wrote: “The New Testament is clear that our acceptance into God’s family is **not the end** of God’s work, but **the beginning!** God has not called us to a life of ‘I have spiritually arrived’ or ‘I am just waiting for heaven.’ Rather, He calls us to a life of constant work, constant growth, and **constant confession and repentance**. **Making us holy is God’s unwavering agenda** until we are taken home to be with Him” (pgs 5-6).

Is there a Biblical basis for making such a statement? There is—and that’s what we’re going to consider next.

3. The declaration that repentance is required for sanctification

Take your Bibles and turn now to I John 1. Notice what it says in vs 3. Pretty safe to say John was referring to believers!

--Look at vs 9, a verse familiar to many of us and probably memorized by a number of us as well.

“If we” [those of us who are God’s children] “confess”—[meaning “say the same thing as God does” about] our sins, “He” [God] is faithful and just **to forgive us our sins**, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

I think you’d agree that although “confess” is not exactly the same thing as “repent,” it requires that we *acknowledge our sin* to God—and *ask Him for forgiveness!*

4. God's desire for repentance

Does God want His children to repent? Of course He does—that's why I John 1:9 is in the Book! God is willing **to forgive**—but we need to be willing **to confess**—"say the same thing" about our sin—that God does!

God's desire for contrition...and humility...and repentance is seen throughout the Bible. Here are several:

Psalm 51:16-17 "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.

¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a **broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart**, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Isaiah 57:15 "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a **contrite and humble spirit**, to **revive the spirit of the humble**, and to **revive the heart of the contrite ones**."

Isaiah 66:2b "...but to this man will I look, even to him that is **poor and of a contrite spirit**, and **trembleth at my word**."

Ezekiel 18:32 "For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: **wherefore turn yourselves**, and live ye."

I Peter 5:5b-6 "...and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth **grace to the humble**.

⁶**Humble yourselves therefore** under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time:"

These last 2 verses in particular really emphasize the fact that God wants His people to **humble themselves** so that He can **give them grace!** And I think you'd agree that **humility and repentance** go hand in hand.

Lastly, I want to consider...**5. The development of repentance**

How do we **develop** repentance? In one way, **we can't because** God the Holy Spirit is the One who **convinces** us in our hearts that we have sinned against God and need to acknowledge that sin and seek forgiveness for that sin.

The flip side, though, is that God tells us in I Peter 5:6 (and James 4:10) that we are to **humble ourselves**. In fact, "humble yourselves"—in both I Peter 5:6 and James 4:10—is in the form of a command!

But...it is in the **passive** voice which means **we are not doing the actual humbling** of ourselves—**someone else** is doing it. And that Someone, of course, is God the Holy Spirit!

So we are back to what I just said a minute ago: **God works** in us to humble us and bring about our repentance! But...I believe there are some practical ways we can assist—instead of resist—God in the process.

First, we must be convinced that... **A. God's desire is that we sin not!**

Notice what it says in **I John 2:1** "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye **sin** not. And if any man **sin**, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:"

We love the second half of the verse, don't we? "If we sin, we have an advocate with the Father." What is **an advocate**? A dictionary definition is simply this: "someone who argues for the cause of another, especially in the court of law." In other words, **a lawyer**. In one sense, Jesus is our lawyer because He represents our case before the Judge—which, of course, is the Father.

But...Jesus is **very different** from human lawyers in at least **four ways**:

- 1) He **agrees with the judge** that we are guilty;
- 2) He doesn't try to get our case **"thrown out"** on some technicality;
- 3) He doesn't **charge us** to represent us in court. Not many human lawyers represent **us for free**, do they?

And—lastly—the one that really sets Jesus apart from human lawyers is this wonderful truth:

- 4) **Jesus Himself has paid** the penalty of our "crimes" **for us!**

I appreciated this quote from **"GotQuestions.com"** about Jesus as our Advocate, representing our case before the Righteous Judge. "We may imagine the conversation going something like this: 'Father, I know this one has sinned and violated our commands. **He is guilty as charged**. However, you have said that **my sacrifice is sufficient payment** for the debt he owes. My righteousness was applied to his account when he trusted in me for salvation and forgiveness. I have paid the price, so he can be pronounced 'Not guilty.' There is no debt left for him to pay." Isn't that a wonderful thought? **There is no debt left for him to pay!**

And because Jesus died on our behalf, God can justly (rightly) forgive us our sins as stated in I John 1:9!

But...as much as we tend to emphasize the **2nd half** of I John 2:1, we tend to skip over the **1st half**: “My little children, these things write I unto you that **ye sin not!**” We—as God’s children—are **not supposed to sin!**

Thankfully, **God follows this up** with a whole **bunch of exceptions... except He doesn’t, does He?**

--It is not okay to sin because you are **crabby...or discouraged...or had a bad day!**

Maybe you’ve seen the video of this cute little girl—probably 5—who comes home from school and says to whoever is recording the video something like: “I really don’t want to talk about it right now. I had a really hard day and I’m tired and I’m crabby and I just want to be left alone.” We are just like her sometimes!

--It is not okay to sin just because you are **hungry...or sick...or tired...or in pain!**

--It is not okay to sin because you’re a **hot-headed German or Italian!**

It is not okay to sin because **you’re stressed...and have too much to do...and don’t have enough time** to do it.

--It is not okay to sin because you **hate your job and** have a **horrible boss**—or because the **kids are misbehaving!** I could go on, but you get the point: we are so good at **making excuses for sin** instead of coming to God and saying, “Please forgive me—and help me not to sin!”

Next, let’s consider... B. God’s definition of sin

John plainly states—**with NO exception clauses**—that God doesn’t want us to sin. But **what is sin?**

--Turn a page—or two—to I John 3. Notice what it says in vs 4. “Sin is the transgression—the disobedience and disregard for—**the law. Whose law?** God’s law!

--I John 5:17 says, “All unrighteousness is sin.” In other words, any time we **fail to do** what is right—and participate in that which is wrong—we sin!

So what does God say we are **to do**—and **not do**? Where do we start, right? How about I John?

--Turn back to I John 2; notice vs 4. We are to keep **His commandments**—but we often times don’t!

--I John 2:6 says we are supposed to walk—meaning **live—the way Jesus lived**—but we often times don’t!

--I John 2:9 says we are **not to hate our brother**—meaning a fellow believer—but sometimes we do!

--I John 2:10 says we are to **love our brother**—again, meaning a fellow believer—but we often times don’t!

--I John 2:15 says we are **not to love the world**—and the things of the world—but too many times we do!

--I John 3:16 says we are to **lay down our life for the brethren**—but we don’t have any desire to do that!

--I John 3:17 says we are to **help those with needs**, but we are often so reluctant to do that!

--I John 5:3 says that loving God involves **keeping His commandments**—and that is commandments are not grievous (meaning burdensome), but often times we look at them as a burden!

--I John 5:14-15 talking about **praying according to God’s will**, but many of God’s people **pray very little**—and aren’t overly concerned about whether or not they are asking according to God’s will when they do pray!

--I John 5:21 says we are to **keep ourselves from idols**—from things that come between us and God—but many times **we welcome things** into our lives that distract us in our walk with God!

Anyone feeling “beat up” a little bit? I hope so because **that was the point!** If we are going to humble ourselves, we need to **recognize our sinfulness** in the sight of God! And the best way to do that is to see the huge difference between what God **wants us to be**—and what we **really are!**

Lastly, let’s consider... C. God’s desire—in light of our sin

In light of the fact that there is a “great gulf” between what God **wants us to be**—and what **we really are**—what is it that God wants us to do? Pretty safe to say that He wants **us to repent**. He wants us to **humble ourselves...and confess our sins...and come to Him** for forgiveness...and **purpose in our hearts** to live our life in a way that is pleasing to Him.

But...God also wants to see how absolutely crucial it is to **depend on Him for daily living!** Jonathan Edwards—a brilliant and gifted theologian in the early 1700s who was used of God to spark “The Great Awakening”—wrote 70 resolutions regarding the conduct of his heart and life—at the **ripe old age of 20!**

In the preface of his resolutions, he penned these words: “Being sensible that I am **unable to do anything without God’s help**, I do humbly entreat Him, by His grace, **to enable me to keep** the Resolutions...”

Simply put, he “got it” that he **needed God’s help** to do that which pleased God.

But—even though **he stated** he understood that without God’s help **he could do nothing**—he later wrote that he had been **far too dependent** on his own efforts! Edwards wrote: “My experience had not then taught me as it has done since, **my extreme feebleness and impotence**, every manner of way; and the bottomless depths of secret corruption and deceit there was in my heart” (Bridges; *The Transforming Power of the Gospel*, 115-116).

Not sure about you, but that’s how it is **with me!** I know things in **my head**—I know them intellectually—but I am **so incredibly slow at being convinced** in my innermost being—in my heart of hearts—just how **helpless and weak** I really am! When we insist on being **independent**—when we think we can live the Christian life in **our own strength**—God consistently—and persistently—shows us that **we can’t!**

Why? Because God wants us to come to the point that Paul wrote of in Romans 7:24 “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

Why does God want us **so desperate?** So that we depend **only on Him!** And when we do that, we will experience what God means by “the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power” (Eph 1:19).

What about you? Do you have a desire to “sin not” and do that which pleases God? You ought to because that is your “reasonable service” according to Romans 12:1!

But if you **really work** at being godly—and I mean, **really work at it**—God will show you how sinful you are and that **without Him you really can’t do anything!**

Don’t give up in despair, though! Why? Because the same grace that **saved you** is also able to **change you!** **How** did you receive the grace that **saved** you? By faith!

How do you receive the grace that **sanctifies** you; that changes you? In the same way....**by faith!** And that is the other side of the coin we will be looking at next week!

So what is it that God would have us do?

1. First and foremost, is Jesus your Savior? Is He your Advocate—your lawyer—that represents you before the Righteous Judge? If not, you will someday hear “Guilty” and “Depart from me, I never knew you”—and be forever separated from God in hell!

2. What is your attitude toward sin? Are you content “just the way you are”?

--I sure hope not!

--Are you reading God’s Word so you know what He expects of you?

--Are you honest with God about how great a gap there is between what He wants you to be—and what you truly are?

--Do you humbly come to Him—daily—to ask for His forgiveness?

--Do you ask Him to help you do what you can’t do?