

## Repent and Believe in Me by John Owings

Yea, say unto them, except they repent, the Lord God will destroy them.  
(Alma 6:21)

“But behold, if the inhabitants of the earth shall repent of their wickedness and abominations, they shall not be destroyed,” saith the Lord of hosts.  
(2 Nephi 12:21)

What comes to your mind when you hear the word **repent**? It might be something like what these two preceding verses convey—that we must forsake all our sins through the repentance process, or else stand at enmity to God and ultimately face His wrath. There is truth in the understanding that our sins put us outside of our Heavenly Father’s presence and the communion with Him that He desires, for it is true that we cannot abide in the holiness of His presence as we cling to sin. So, while these verses describe a true perspective on repentance, we will not reach a complete understanding of this fundamental gospel principle until we can see it in the light of God’s all-encompassing love.

The scriptures also reveal that to turn from sin is to turn to God. When Alma commanded his son, Corianton, to repent from evil deeds, he said: **...refrain from your iniquities; that ye turn to the Lord with all your mind, might and strength,** (Alma 19:19) Note the word **turn**. The Hebrew word translated **repent** is formed from a verb root word meaning **to turn**. In the Greek language the New Testament writers used, the word translated **repentance** means a change in the heart and mind. When Jesus speaks of the most important commandment in Mark 12:35-36 he states:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment. And the second is like this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

Jesus is describing a depth of love for God that is a reflection of the universe of love He expresses to us. This love is not bounded, but further reflects His love by including those around us (Mark 12:36). I believe He is here describing for us the heart condition that is most fundamental to repentance. To turn to God with the whole heart is to turn away from and leave behind the things of self and the world that separate us from His love, as we allow place in our hearts and lives for these lesser things.

Brother Arthur Oakman gives a penetrating description of man’s dilemma around repentance—the dilemma that is our fundamental need for God’s love to govern our lives,

while our natural tendency is to place ourselves as supreme ruler of our lives. He says: "We are selves...a gift of God given in creation. Being selves we have become self-centered. It is not wrong to be a self; it is wrong to be self-centered. There is a freedom of self-determination that is utter bondage. This is the freedom of man to do as he pleases, but this freedom is simply man's power to destroy himself. There is a bondage that is perfect freedom, and this is the bondage of love." <sup>(1)</sup> When we use our agency to turn away from our self-centered nature and turn toward God's love for us, we can, by the guidance of His Holy Spirit, be drawn into God's presence and **learn of Him** as He desires. As we learn His ways, to begin to know the heart and the will of Our Father, even our limited capacity to grasp the depth and power of His love will fundamentally impact our choices. In true repentance, we take God's part against ourselves. We stop asking, "What will my sin bring to me?" and start asking, "What does my sin mean to God?" F. Henry Edwards explains this perspective on repentance as follows: "The root meaning of the word repentance is rethinking, or thinking again; Christian repentance is ceasing to think as men have thought and thinking again in the way that God thinks...Repentance is rethinking of the kind that results in reliving, in changing ideals and purposes, and in growing righteousness." <sup>(2)</sup>

As I acknowledge true repentance is not my natural tendency, how can this transformation become a reality in my life? Oakman concludes his quote above with our answer: "*This lifting of self from itself as center must be done by power that is outside of self. The love of God disclosed in Jesus is the only power by which this can be done.*" <sup>(3)</sup> Only God's love and power can transform us. As we truly seek Him and His will for our lives, He imparts His Holy Spirit to guide and direct us. God tells us that He has planned to perform this work in us from the beginning, as He speaks to us through His servant, Nephi: **For he is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. And the way is prepared from the foundation of the world, if it so be that they repent and come unto him;** (1 Nephi 3:27-28) Our Heavenly Father tells us how He desires to achieve this transformation in us, that He is actively reaching out to us. Here, He speaks that truth through Alma: **Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men; for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith, Repent, and I will receive you;** (Alma 3:57)

Despite God's great love and His desire to draw us into His presence, He cannot start the process of repentance for us. God can save us, transform us, fulfill us and give us peace, but He will not violate our agency. Repentance is a choice; it requires action on my part. Repentance is the application of the agency God gave me to turn toward Him. He knows the intent of our hearts and requires we seek Him in spirit and truth: **Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I beseech of you in words of soberness, that ye would repent, and come with full purpose of heart, and cleave unto God as he cleaveth unto you.** (Jacob 4:8) So, how do I make this process of repentance a truthful choice in my life? As I have searched the scriptures desiring to fully comprehend repentance, I have been impressed how Jesus emphasized faith during His ministry.

**He said:**

**Thy faith hath made thee whole.** (Mark 10:53)

**I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.** (Luke 7:9)

**Thy faith hath saved thee;** (Luke 7:50)

**I see that your faith is sufficient, that I should heal you.** (3 Nephi 8:8)

**Father, I thank thee that thou hast purified these whom I have chosen, because of their faith.** (3 Nephi 9:28)

I believe it is the leading of His Spirit that has impressed upon me the common factor of humbleness in all these instances of the healing power, saving power and purifying power of faith. As we read the stories behind these instances of Jesus' emphasis on faith's power, we find desperation and the outpouring of the Spirit's power causing these who were so touched to see **the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long suffering towards you unworthy creatures.** (Mosiah 2:20) In Jesus' own words

And behold I have given you the law and the commandments of my Father, that ye shall believe in me, and that ye shall repent of your sins, and **come unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit.** (3 Nephi 5:66)

When I realize how desperately I need what only God can give and become humbled in that knowledge to reach out with whatever faith I can muster, He will strengthen my faith and lead me by His Spirit in the way of repentance. The way of repentance is the only way I can come unto God and be made whole.

God desires to make us whole and fulfill all His promises in our lives. These words that Jesus spoke to the Nephites are just as true for you and me today:

Will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you? Yea, verily I say unto you, If ye will come unto me, ye shall have eternal life. (3 Nephi 4:41- 42).

Oh to be healed, to know the life God created us to live—not sometime in the future, but now! I want to underscore this vital truth through a testimony. Among all those God has blessed me to know, there is a subset of people I will call special. They are mostly elderly, and some are gone now. One day, I had reason to spend a few moments with four of them. At my first stop, I spent moments with one who had been blessed with special talents he put to very good use through the years. Lives were touched with kindness, and he was surrounded by loving family. Illness had taken his ability to enjoy and share his talents, as well as his ability to walk, but had not diminished the spirit in him that had

defined his life. I think I might be resentful to become unable to do the things I have loved, but he showed none of that. I went to my next stop and sat with one who has had some hardships in life, and the bitterness that remains seems to now dominate that person's life. This unhappiness was the focus of our time that day, as it had been before and has been since. I went then to the home of one whose story I can only guess, but the clues I saw in the few times we met were the Vietnam War, isolation and alcohol. That day, he pointed to a TV and said, "That's all I have left...it's on 24 hours a day. I can't even sleep." My last stop that day was to a home I have only visited once. I met a husband and wife; one had been rendered helpless by a massive stroke, and the other was a full-time caregiver. I was touched by the peaceful spirit evident in the caregiver, who commented on taking early retirement in order to fulfill the obvious needs. As I looked briefly at the walls in their home, I could see their priorities— faith and family. As I made my way home, I couldn't help but wonder how I would manage if faced with the need to set all else aside in order to fulfill my marriage covenant. I thought about the contrast in the lives that had touched mine that day and, at that moment, the Spirit poured over me. I understood plainly, "the differences you've seen in the outcomes of life today has EVERYTHING TO DO WITH REPENTANCE". Repentance was the central theme of a sermon I was preparing earlier that week. I knew with certainty I was being instructed on the words of John the baptizer. I had read, **Repent, therefore, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance;** (Matthew 3:35) There are outcomes tied to our life choices; do the outcomes of our life demonstrate what the power of repentance has done within us? Our Heavenly Father desires to transform our lives today through the power of repentance. He waits only for us to turn to Him with full purpose in our hearts.

And I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me, and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me; (3 Nephi 5:33)

- (1) A. Oakman; "He Who Is" from chapter descriptions "III-The Idea of Restoration"; Herald Publishing House
- (2) F.H. Edwards; "For Such a Time", p117; Herald Publishing House
- (3) A. Oakman; "He Who Is" from chapter descriptions "III-The Idea of Restoration"; Herald Publishing House