

The Command to Repent

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of repentance as a command from God, a change of mind that involves the conscience, and a necessary step for salvation.

Duration: 37:17

Scripture: Exodus 20:7-8, Exodus 20:17, Matthew 6:33, Acts 17:30-31, Romans 7:9

Topics: "Repentance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a joyful incident that occurred in their assembly involving a marine from the Naval Air Station in Alameda. The marine had been attending the assembly with his believer wife and was becoming increasingly convicted of his sin. One night, he was invited to participate in the breaking of bread, where he witnessed the enactment of Calvary and was deeply moved. After the bread was passed, he stood up and expressed his gratitude for the prayers of the assembly and his wife, and he acknowledged God's mysterious ways. He then burst into tears and later shared his testimony after being saved. The speaker emphasizes the power of prayer and the work of God in bringing people to repentance and salvation.

Transcript

They come back the same year every time. This is the fifth year we've been back. It's nice to have Charlie Willer with us today.

And I'm glad Charlie could be here because he and his wife and three boys will be leaving to go back to Ecuador. They've been in Ecuador for seven years, as some of you know, and they'll be leaving to go back in August, Lord willing. And it's really good to have people praying for you when you're on the mission field.

Somebody said, I judge my effectiveness by the number of people I pray for and the number of people who pray for me. That's good, isn't it? I judge my effectiveness by the number of people I pray for and the number of people who pray for me. And I really believe when the story is told that the work of God is really carried on by the prayers of God's people behind the scenes.

So I hope you get to meet Charlie after the meeting. And also, Tim Driver is with us. Tim is 18 years old.

He comes from an assembly in Daly City, California. And he's going out to Zambia for sort of a year's apprenticeship with Bob and Viola Young and for the Lord to lead from there on, too. I think he must have very special parents.

I know them, but I don't know them that well. But don't you think they're pretty special? If you had an 18-year-old son, how would you feel about him going to Zambia? Well, they're rejoicing. They're really just delighted that their oldest son is taking off for the mission field.

I think that's very good. Thank you. Can we turn in our Bibles, please, to Acts 17? And just a couple of verses, really.

I'm just going to break into the middle of a passage here, Paul's message on Mars Hill in Athens. And if I may just read verses 30 and 31. Acts 17, verses 30 and 31.

Notice those words. God now commands all men everywhere to repent. God has a word for this planet.

That word is repent. I thought the word was believe. The word that comes before believe, and that's the word repent.

And some of you will be thinking, well, why are you talking about that? I mean, most of us here are Christians today anyway. I know it, but we're carrying on evangelistic work, and I'd like to ask the question, what place does repentance have in our evangelism? Because, you know, it's a missing ingredient in much modern evangelism today. I mean, we go out and buttonhole people in the street and we say, God loves you and he has a wonderful plan for your life.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved. And you know, that's not right. That's not right.

No, it's not right to go up to people who don't even know they're lost and tell them to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Only lost people can be saved. In the book of Acts, no one but convicted sinners were ever told to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

We try to gloss over sin, and that's where God begins with sin. God now commands all men everywhere to what? Repent. God, an awesome being, now, not someday in the future, now, commands.

Not a suggestion. This is a command of the living God. Who does he command? All men.

That's why I say God has a word for this planet. That word is repent. All men everywhere.

No exclusion of all. What does he want them to do? He wants them to repent. What is repentance? Well, it's often defined as a change of mind, but it's more than a change of mind.

Repentance is a change of mind that involves the conscience. I say to a man, are you a sinner? He says in a casual way, of course, we're all sinners. That's not repentance.

That's kind of an intellectual assent to a fact. But repentance is more than that. Repentance involves a man's conscience.

Before I'm saved, I'm walking toward sin with my back toward God. When I get saved, I'm walking toward God with my back toward sin. I have done an about-face.

Face. That's what repentance is. It's an about-face with regard to God.

With regard to Christ. With regard to sin. And with regard to myself.

Repentance. An about-face with regard to God, Christ, self. Repentance is the sinner's realization of his lostness and his need of God's grace.

That's a wonderful thing. And I want to tell you today, if you've never repented, you've never been saved. And the United States today is filled with people who profess to be born again, and they've never known conviction of sin.

They say, if you say, are you a Christian? They say, of course I'm a Christian. They've never repented of their sins. It's a mere, shallow profession.

God wants reality. Repentance is not the same as penitence. Penitence is being sorry for your sin.

A lot of people are sorry for their sin because of the trouble it brings on themselves. Judas was sorry for his sin, but he didn't repent, in the godly sense of the word. Repentance is not the same as penance.

People think that they can atone for their own sins by doing works of penance. I think if I could just do so many cartwheels down the middle aisle of a church, you know, that would please God. Or if I could do without watermelon during Lent, or, you know, things like that.

That's penance. But man can't atone for his sin. What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

And it's not the same as reformation. Reformation is turning over a little and saying, well, I'm going to try to do better next time. It's not repentance, it's reformation.

Repentance is a work of the Spirit of God in my life where he brings me to the end of myself. I say, I'm going to be done with sin. And I'm going to reach out in faith and trust the Savior.

Now, some of our dear Christian friends don't like to use the word repentance in connection with the gospel. And I'll tell you why. Because they're afraid that repentance becomes a work.

And we're not saved by works. Right? By grace are ye saved through faith. Let not of yourselves that is the gift of God not of work, lest any man should loathe it.

Uh-uh. Don't talk about repentance, because repentance is a work. And it's faith and faith alone.

How would you answer that? I mean, some good Christian people say that. Well, let me tell you something. Repentance is a work.

And faith is a work. But when we say that we're not saved by works, we mean not by meritorious works. Not by works that give us merit before God.

And repentance certainly isn't that kind of a work, is it? And faith isn't that kind of a work. You say, is faith a work? Yes. The Jews came to Jesus one day, and they said, what good work, listen, what good work must we do that we might work the works of God? And Jesus said, this is the work of God that you believe on him whom he has sent.

Hm? Jesus said that. This is the work of God that you believe. Faith is a work.

But it's not a meritorious work. I can't pat myself on the back and say, nice going, McDonald, you believed on Jesus. I don't accrue merit before God by believing on Jesus.

Christ is my merit, not Bill McDonald. I'd be a fool not to believe on Jesus. I mean, what is there about the Lord Jesus that makes it impossible to believe on him? He's the most credible person in the universe.

So let me emphasize that. Yes, faith is a work. I'll grant you faith is a work.

It's not a meritorious work. And when Paul says in Ephesians 2, 8, 9, not a works that they mentioned both, he's talking about meritorious works. I cannot work my soul to save this work my Lord has done.

That's it. In my hand no price I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. And repentance in that sense is a work, but it's not a meritorious work.

When I repent, I'm groveling in the dust before God. Not a meritorious work in that sense. But you know, it's interesting, as you go through the Gospels and the Epistles and the New Testament, it's interesting the emphasis there is on repentance.

John called, John the Baptist, called on the people to repent. That was his message. Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.

Jesus came upon the scene. What did he say? He said, unless you repent, you'll all likewise perish. That's what he said.

Oh, you'll offend people if you say. They have to be offended before they can be saved. The doctor has to use a scalpel to perform the surgery for the recovery of the patient.

And God is the great surgeon. The disciples called on men to repent. Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.

Peter preached the word with power. The people came and repented. And they said, men and brethren, what shall we do? It was easy to tell them what to do then.

Paul called on the people to repent here. And even the Lord Jesus in the letters to the churches in Revelation. What did he tell them? Five out of the seven, I think, he said, repent.

Repent. That was the word. Job repented in the Old Testament.

Job said, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes. That's it. Have you ever said that? I abhor myself.

Well, it's not good psychology today, is it? I mean, you're supposed to have a good self-image. You know, that's the hellish thing. So much modern psychology and counseling is telling people to think good about themselves.

And God is trying to get them to think bad about themselves. God's trying to get them to realize that they're lost, guilty sinners and in danger of eternal hell. And psychology says you must have a good self-image.

You know, self-esteem. These are the big buzzwords today. Well, I want to tell you this straight from the pit.

You read a book like Self-Esteem, The New Reformation. What is sin? Sin is when you have a bad self-image. What's the new birth? The new birth is when you exchange a bad self-image for a good self-image.

What is hell? Hell is the remorse you go through because you have a bad self-image. This is what's being taught. Isn't that wonderful? I never saw it in the Bible before.

Well, the reason they never saw it is because it isn't there. It's not in the Bible. I say that.

God is trying to get men to realize what they are in the sight of a sin-hating God. And modern psychology and all the counseling is telling people to have a good self-image. No wonder they don't get saved.

It's going contrary to the word of God. John Newton repented. John Newton, you know, was a slave trader.

And he wrote that hymn and he said, My conscience, get this, My conscience owned and felt its guilt And plunged me in despair. I saw my sins, his blood had spilt And helped to nail him there. That's repentance, huh? My conscience owned and felt its guilt And plunged me in despair.

Robert Murray McShane knew what repentance was. He said, When free grace awoke me with light from on high Then legal fears shook me, I trembled to die. That's good.

No refuge, no safety in self could I see. Jehovah said to you, Is all things to me. You know what God is looking for? God is looking for sinners Who will acknowledge they're sinners.

Not looking for good people. P.J. Loazzo said one time, I wish I could find a sinner. I have a message for him.

It's so hard to find sinners. Everybody looks at the totem pole And they're higher up on the totem pole. They see the mafia down there And they're doing better than the mafia.

You can always find somebody Who's worse than yourself. But God is trying to get you alone In the presence of God And see yourself as God sees you And then repent. People say to me, I'm not so bad.

But I have to say to them What I had to find out in my own life. What you are Is a lot worse than anything you've ever done. That's true.

I was brought up in a very strict Christian home. And I was never allowed to go to show. Never allowed to go to a dance.

Never spoke. Never drank. Never did any of those things in my life.

I was just a proud little Pharisee. You know, When I was 18 years of age, The Holy Spirit began to work on my heart. And he started to expose what I am inside.

Boy, nobody like that could ever go to heaven. I realized then That what I am Is a lot worse than anything I'd ever done. And that's true.

But I found out something else. The Lord Jesus died For what I am Just as much as for the sins I committed. I tell you, that was an emancipating truth.

Jesus died for what you are As well as for the sins you've committed. And what you are is worse. You see, the capacity of the human heart for sin, Huh? It's enormous.

It's enormous. You look within and you see nothing but a pit of corruption inside. Jesus said, am I not so bad? I said, well, let's look at the Ten Commandments.

Let's look at the Ten Commandments. The first commandment, Thou shalt have no other gods before me. He said, I don't have any other gods before him.

Just a minute. Who's on the throne of your life? Your unsaved self is on the throne of your life. The God is not.

He said, I don't have any other gods. They do. They have money.

They have sex. They have power. And mostly, no.

The second commandment says, Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. No idols. God said, I don't want you to have any other idols.

He said, I don't have any. I don't worship a graven image of stone or wood. He said, no.

You have a lot of other idols, though. What's the idol in your life today? Is it God? Hardly. I think of a young man who died.

He was a motorcyclist. He died in San Francisco some years ago. And when they buried him, they buried him with his motorcycle.

And his mother stood at the grave, and she said it was his life. How do you like that? He probably said, I don't have any idol in my life. He was buried with his idol.

It was a motorcycle. Another man worked himself up from the bottom, and he finally was able to buy a Cadillac. And when they opened his will, it requested he be buried in his Cadillac.

So there they put his corpse behind the wheel with his hands on the wheel, and they dug this huge pit and buried him in it. And one of his friends stood by the grave and said, Man, that's living. People's lives are filled with idols today, and they don't realize it.

It might be a car. It might be a house. It might be your own children.

It's possible. It's possible for a person's own children to take the place of God in their lives. God never intended it to be so.

The third commandment, Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that take of his name in vain. And I think of how, in fact it was mentioned in the earlier meeting, how the name of the Lord is taken in profanity. It's amazing, isn't it? I never hear people swearing by the Pope.

I never hear them swearing by the President of the United States or by Gorbachev. They swear by Jesus. And a lot of people who never use profanity in public use it in private when they're all alone.

Private profanity. A bishop was walking down the street one day and there was a high hedge to the right of him and one of his parishioners was on the other side of the hedge. And the parishioner was rather shocked at what he heard.

It was theological words. That wasn't nice, the way he used them. Private profanity.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. The fourth one. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, you say.

Ah, we got you there. Because we're not under the Sabbath. That's true.

The Sabbath day was given to the Jewish people. The seventh day of the week. Saturday.

Always was and always will be the Sabbath. Saturday is the Sabbath day. And the Jewish people were commanded not to do any work on the Sabbath day.

You say, we don't have the Sabbath. That's right, we don't have the Sabbath today. But I want to tell you the first day of the week is set apart in a special way in the New Testament.

Not as a day of obligation like the Sabbath, but a day of special privilege. The Lord Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week. He, on two subsequent first days of the week, he appeared to his disciples in the upper room.

The Holy Spirit was given on the first day of the week. The Christians gathered together to remember the Lord on the first day of the week. Paul instructed the Corinthians to lay by and store as the Lord had prospered them on the first day of the week.

And I believe there's a special way in which the first day of the week is set apart in the Word of God for worship and service. When we're released from secular employment and we're able to devote this day in a special way to the worship and service of the Lord Jesus Christ. And yet, there are many Christians today that will grab at any excuse to absent themselves from the meetings of the Lord's people on the first day of the week.

I mean, it doesn't have to be anything more than a family reunion and groundhog day and you'll find them there. You know? Really. I don't like it.

The Jews had six days to worship and one day to rest. We've got six days to play football and one day that we can set apart for the lovely Lord Jesus. I think if you love the Lord, you'll love his day too, won't you? It's his day.

It's the Lord's day. And although I don't believe in keeping the Sabbath in the Old Testament sense of the word, I do believe there's a divine principle in the Word of God. One day in seven.

I do. And Russia tried, the Soviets tried to do away with that, you know, and work people seven days a week. It didn't work.

They had to go back. I mean, some of these rules are built into the Constitution of man. God knows what he's doing.

And even a great nation like the Soviet Republic, they had to change. They couldn't work people seven days a week. What's the next commandment? It says, honor your father and your mother.

Today's may be long upon the earth. This is the first commandment with prominence. I do honor my mother.

I give her a box of chocolates on Mother's Day. That's not what it means. I say, well I do.

I give my father a tie on Father's Day. That's not what it means. You know, it's really horrible the way parents, I don't know any parents that are really ever thanked adequately for all they've done.

I've never known any. But I have known parents who are honored by their children for all that. When my father died, the undertaker took us into a big room to pick out a casket for him, for his body, you know.

And he began at \$2,000, which probably is a lot more than that today, I don't know. And he said, remember, this is the last thing you can do for your father. We said, nonsense.

We did for my father what he was living. Well, he said, you know, he changed his tune right away. He said, you know, we had a customer, children who buried their mother in a \$2,000 dress.

Imagine. He said, nonsense. Treat her disrespectfully all through life and then dress her in a \$2,000 dress while her body's in the casket.

This is it. That's not what it means, is it? Honor your father. That means you don't sash your mother and your father.

You don't steal from them. You treat them with honor and respect. What's the next commandment? It says, thou shalt not kill.

Oh, I've never committed murder. I know. How we try to weasel.

You know what we're like? We're like beetles. You pick up one stone and the beetle scurries under another stone. This is what we're like.

And God's trying to nail us down there. He said, I've sinned. Thou shalt not kill.

Well, the Lord Jesus pointed out that anger is murder, and it is. Anger is murder in embryo. It's in that moment of anger that you can do something and kill a person.

But even if you've never done that, I want to tell you something. It's your sins that nailed the Son of God to the cross, and mine too. The worst murder that was ever accomplished in this world.

We had a part in it. Thou shalt not kill. Isn't that amazing? When God sent His lovely Son down to this planet, man took Him and nailed Him to a tree.

We have a camp near us called Koinonia, and some years ago, some junior high kids were talking to the camp, and they had this story about some men that visited from outer space and came to the earth. And pretty soon, they got talking to the men of earth, and they were just like kids arguing whose father is the greatest. The men of the earth said, look, we've flown to the moon.

And the men from outer space said, so what? We've been engaged in interplanetary travel all the time. So the argument went on, and finally the men of earth said, well, God came to this planet 1,900 years ago. And the men from outer space said, He did show Him to us.

But the men of earth said, we can't. We killed Him. Kind of sobering, isn't it? Thou shalt not kill.

Thou shalt not commit adultery. Of course, Jesus said that the look of lust is adultery, isn't it? That's where it begins. That's true.

You know, if Jesus came back to earth today, He couldn't find very many companies of people where He wouldn't have to say to a woman, Go call your husband. Where He wouldn't have to say to a man, Go call your wife. Because people are living outside the marriage relationship.

And it's accepted. Everybody's doing it. The Word of God says, Thou shalt not commit adultery.

And it's amazing, out in California, how many of the dear people that we see being saved, it was the story of their life before they got saved. Broken homes, broken hearts, broken marriages, adultery, and all the rest. Praise God.

The grace of God is wonderful. And they make wonderful Christians after they get saved. Don't steal.

Don't steal. Listen, if you're an unbeliever today, you've stolen worship and honor and service from the God who made you. You don't steal.

Take what doesn't belong to you. I tell you, through the entrance of sin into the world, God was robbed of worship and honor and glory and service. And thanksgiving and a million and one other things.

And the Word of God says, Thou shalt not steal. Don't lie. Don't lie.

I want to tell you something. Our whole civilization is built on lies today. All the way from the IRS to the classroom.

It really is. We had a young man in our program last year. He worked for General Motors in Detroit.

He moved out to California. And they moved him. Because he was going to work for General Motors.

And his move cost \$25,000. And if he stayed with General Motors for 39 months, they would absorb that price. But if he left before that, that was taxable.

And he did. And he left before those 39 months to come to the discipleship intern training program. And all that money became taxable.

And he went to H&R Block to get help with his taxes. And he told them about this. And they said, Don't worry.

The government will never know. He said, I have to worry. I'm a Christian.

And he had to pay the taxes on \$25,000 when he scarcely had it to pay. Our whole civilization is built upon, Don't worry. Nobody will ever know.

It's a lie. It's true in schools. Somebody had said that if all of the diplomas that were earned dishonestly were returned to schools and colleges, they wouldn't be able to have space to put them.

They'd have to build sheds to put the diplomas. No wonder. You know, the Ten Commandments are really wonderful.

They just strike it in the n-word. And the last commandment is, Don't covet. Thou shalt not covet.

That's the thought life of all. You know, you might have got through those first nine very comfortably, did I tell you? That last one's a killer. Don't covet.

Thou shalt not covet. Coveting takes place in the mind. And this is a commandment that slew the Apostle Paul.

Remember, he says that in Romans chapter 7. Commandment came, sin revived, and I died. Because outwardly he had been a pretty moral guy, you know, Paul. But then he began to think of his thought life, and I tell you, it didn't bear inspection.

Because that's true of all of us. What's the worst thought you've thought this last week? Would you like it to be put on a cardboard and wear it around publicly for an hour? I wouldn't. Thou shalt not covet.

And God wants men and women to repent. Because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness. And what the Ten Commandments say in short is, Love God with all your soul, mind, heart, and strength.

Love God with all your heart. That means with all your affectionate powers. With all your soul, that means with all your emotional powers.

With all your mind, that means with all your intellectual powers. With all your strength, that means with all your physical powers. That's what the law says.

Love God with every part of your being. Don't you do? You hardly ever talk to him. You certainly don't love him.

You certainly don't obey him. You certainly don't worship him. God wants us, God wants people to repent.

God says repent or perish. Christ didn't come to call righteous people, but he came to call sinners to repentance. There's more joy in heaven over one person who repents than over 99 just persons who don't need repentance.

Actually, there aren't 99 just persons who don't need repentance, but there are 99 who don't think they do, who aren't willing to admit that they do. That's what it's speaking about. There aren't any people who don't need repentance, but there are those self-righteous people that just refuse to acknowledge it.

But what really causes joy in heaven is when a person gets down and says, Lord, I sinned. Save me by your grace. I was telling some of the friends about an incident we had recently in our assembly that's given us great joy.

There was a marine attending. He was from the Naval Air Station in Alameda, and he had been coming week after week. His wife was a believer, and we could see that he was becoming increasingly convicted

of his sin.

One night, Tom Rodriguez said, Why don't you come to break in a bread with us? You won't participate now, but just come to break in a bread with us. For the first time in his life, Dave Strickland came to a breaking of bread. He sat there, and he saw Calvary enacted before his eyes.

He saw the bread speaking of the body of Christ and the cup speaking of the blood of Christ. After the bread had been passed, he grabbed the usher by the hand, and he said, Matt, I've got to say something. Well, that's very unusual for an unsaved person to say something in the breaking of bread meeting, isn't it? And dear Dave Strickland, 6'4", brawny marine, got to his feet, and he said, Now I know that you dear people have been praying for me.

His voice is quavering. He said, My wife has been praying for me, God bless her soul. And his voice broke.

He said, God moves in mysterious ways. And then he just burst down crying. When he recovered his composure, he said, Praise the Lord.

He sat down, and he was saved. He was the third person we've had saved at the breaking of bread. Convicted of sin, brought to the end of himself.

Marines don't cry. You know that. But I tell you, when God gets ahold of you, you do.

You could just hear his testimony when he was baptized. It's beautiful. Bring the tears to your eyes.

Why does God delay? Why doesn't he do something about it? The goodness of God leads thee to what? Repentance. God's not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. You say, But you haven't told the gospel.

Of course not. Repentance comes first. You know, I believe that the gospel coin is a coin with two sides.

I believe repentance is one side, and faith is the other side. But you've got to begin on this side. You've got to come and acknowledge, I'm a lost, guilty sinner.

But I believe Jesus died for me in the cross of Calvary, and the best way I know how, I receive him as my Lord and Savior. God wants, commands, all men, everywhere, to repent. Because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained for us, who he gave us assurance, and that he raised him from the dead.

Just as surely as Christ was raised from the dead, he's going to judge the world in righteousness. Before that happens, you ought to repent. Then trust the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

I don't know if God's speaking to anybody here today. If he is, feel free to come down here afterwards. I'll wait down here and be glad to talk to anybody who might be having spiritual problems of any kind.

Just feel free to come and talk to us. We've found it a great joy to be able to help you from the word of God. Shall we pray? Father, we marvel today at your wonderful grace and your long-suffering.

Here we are, just a race of lost, sinful, degraded men, your enemies, cut off by wicked works. And yet you linger in long-suffering mercy over us, not willing that any should perish, calling us to repentance and then to trust the sinner's Savior. We pray that you'll speak to any hearts today who've never come to this point

of repentance, still their heads held high in the air, still standing on their feet, not kneeling.

Lord, we pray that in our evangelism, too, that we might not gloss over sin lightly, that we may not heal lightly the wound of the daughter of your people. O Lord, that we might deal faithfully with people and see the Spirit of God bringing them to deep conviction of sin and then to that wonderful decision for Christ. Bless your word today, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Feel free to come down afterwards if you'd like to talk to us.

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