

Repentance and Conversion

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A repentant soul is a converted soul, and a converted soul is a repentant soul.



Last year while Elder David S. Baxter and I were driving to a stake conference, we stopped at a restaurant. Later when returning to our car, we were approached by a woman who called out to us. We were startled by her appearance. Her grooming (or lack of it) was what I might politely call “extreme.” She asked if we were elders in the Church. We said yes. Almost unrestrained, she told the story of her tragic life, swamped in sin. Now, only 28 years old, she was miserable. She felt worthless, with nothing to live for. As she spoke, the sweetness of her soul began to emerge. Pleading tearfully, she asked if there was any

hope for her, any way up and out of her hopelessness.

“Yes,” we responded, “there is hope. Hope is linked to repentance. You can change. You can ‘come unto Christ, and be perfected in him.’”¹ We urged her not to procrastinate.² She sobbed humbly and thanked us sincerely.

As Elder Baxter and I continued our journey, we pondered that experience. We recalled the counsel given to a hopeless soul by Aaron, who said, “If thou wilt repent of all thy sins, and will bow down before God, and call on his name in faith, . . . then shalt thou receive the hope which thou desirest.”³

Now, at this closing session of general conference, I too speak on repentance. I do so because the Lord has commanded His servants to cry repentance unto all people.⁴ The Master has restored His gospel to bring joy to His children, and repentance is a crucial component of that gospel.⁵

The doctrine of repentance is as old as the gospel itself. Biblical teachings from the books of Genesis⁶ to Revelation⁷ teach repentance. Lessons from Jesus Christ during His mortal ministry include these warnings: “The kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel”⁸ and “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”⁹

References to repentance are even more frequent in the Book of Mormon.¹⁰ To the people of ancient America, the Lord gave this commandment: “Again I say unto you, ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, and become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.”¹¹

With the Restoration of the gospel, our Savior has again stressed this doctrine. The word *repent* in any of its forms appears in 47 of the 138 sections of the Doctrine and Covenants!¹²

Repent from Sin

What does it mean to repent? We begin with a dictionary’s definition that to repent is “to turn from sin . . . to feel sorrow [and] regret.”¹³ To repent from sin is not easy. But the prize is worth the price. Repentance needs to be done one step at a time. Humble prayer will facilitate each essential step. As prerequisites to forgiveness, there must first be recognition, remorse, then confession.¹⁴ “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them.”¹⁵ Confession is to be made to the person who has been wronged. Confession should be sincere and not merely an admission of guilt after proof is evident. If many persons have been offended, confession should be made to all offended parties. Acts that may affect one’s standing in the Church or the right to its privileges should be confessed promptly to the bishop, whom the Lord has called as a common judge in Israel.¹⁶

The next step is restitution—to repair damage done—if possible. Then come steps to resolve to do better and refrain from relapse—to repent “with full purpose of heart.”¹⁷ Thanks to the ransom paid by the Atonement of Jesus Christ, full forgiveness is given to the sinner who repents and remains free from sin.¹⁸ To the repentant soul, Isaiah said, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;



though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”¹⁹

The Lord’s imperative emphasis on repentance is evident as we read from section 19 of the Doctrine and Covenants: “I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not.

“For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;

“But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I.”²⁰

While the Lord insists on our repentance, most people don’t feel such a compelling need.²¹ They include themselves among those who try to be good. They have no evil intent.²² Yet the Lord is clear in His message that *all* need to repent—not only from sins of *commission* but from sins of *omission* as well. Such is the case in His warning to parents: “Inasmuch as parents have children in Zion . . . that teach them *not* to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism

and the gift of the Holy Ghost . . . , the sin be upon the heads of the parents.”²³

Broader Meaning of the Word Repent

The doctrine of repentance is much broader than a dictionary’s definition. When Jesus said “repent,” His disciples recorded that command in the Greek language with the verb *metanoeo*.²⁴ This powerful word has great significance. In this word, the prefix *meta* means “change.”²⁵ The suffix relates to four important Greek terms: *nous*, meaning “the mind”;²⁶ *gnosis*, meaning “knowledge”;²⁷ *pneuma*, meaning “spirit”;²⁸ and *pnoe*, meaning “breath.”²⁹

Thus, when Jesus said “repent,” He asked us to change—to change our mind, knowledge, and spirit—even our breath. A prophet explained that such a change in one’s breath is to breathe with grateful acknowledgment of Him who grants each breath. King Benjamin said, “If ye should serve him who has created you . . . and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath . . . from one moment to another—I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye

would be unprofitable servants.”³⁰

Yes, the Lord has commanded us to repent, to change our ways, to come unto Him, and be more like Him.³¹ This requires a total change. Alma so taught his son: “Learn wisdom in thy youth,” he said. “Learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God. . . . Let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever.”³²

To repent fully is to convert completely to the Lord Jesus Christ and His holy work. Alma taught that concept when he posed these questions: “I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?”³³ That change comes when we are “born again,” converted and focused upon our journey to the kingdom of God.³⁴

Fruits of Repentance

The fruits of repentance are sweet. Repentant converts find that the truths of the restored gospel govern their thoughts and deeds, shape their

habits, and forge their character. They are more resilient and able to deny themselves of all ungodliness.³⁵ Moreover, uncontrolled appetite,³⁶ addiction to pornography or harmful drugs,³⁷ unbridled passion,³⁸ carnal desire,³⁹ and unrighteous pride⁴⁰ are diminished with complete conversion to the Lord and a determination to serve Him and to emulate His example.⁴¹ Virtue garnishes their thoughts, and self-confidence grows.⁴² Tithing is seen as a joyful and protective blessing, not as a duty or a sacrifice.⁴³ Truth becomes more attractive, and things praiseworthy become more engaging.⁴⁴

Repentance is the Lord's regimen for spiritual growth. King Benjamin explained that "the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father."⁴⁵ Brothers and sisters, that means conversion! Repentance is conversion! A repentant soul is a converted soul, and a converted soul is a repentant soul.

Repentance for Those Who Are Dead

Each living person can repent. But what about those who have died? They also have opportunities to repent. Scripture declares that "the faithful elders of this dispensation, when they depart from mortal life, continue their labors in the preaching of the gospel of repentance . . . among those who are . . . under the bondage of sin in the great world of the spirits of the dead.

"The dead who repent will be redeemed, through obedience to the ordinances of the house of God,



"And after they have paid the penalty of their transgressions, and are washed clean, [they] shall receive a reward according to their works."⁴⁶

The Prophet Joseph Smith further revealed that "the earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is a welding link of some kind or other between the fathers and the children. . . . We without [our dead] cannot be made perfect; neither can they without us be made perfect. . . . [This] dispensation is now beginning to usher in, that a whole and complete and perfect union, and welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories should take place."⁴⁷

"Jesus wants me for a sunbeam"?⁴⁸ Yes! And you too! He also wants us as bonding blacksmiths—creating celestial welding links—to curb the curse⁴⁹ of family fragmentation. The earth was created and temples provided so that families can be together forever.⁵⁰ Many, if not most, of us could repent and be converted to more temple and family history work for our ancestors. Thus, our repentance is necessary and essential for their repentance.

For all our kindred dead, to the 28-year-old woman mired in the swamp of sin, and to each one of us, I declare that the sweet blessing of repentance is possible. It comes through complete conversion to

the Lord and His holy work.

I know that God lives. Jesus is the Christ. This is His Church. His prophet today is President Gordon B. Hinckley. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Moroni 10:32.
2. See Alma 13:27; 34:33. President Spencer W. Kimball described procrastination as "an unwillingness to accept personal responsibilities now" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* [2006], 4).
3. Alma 22:16. We also remember the sinful people under the care of their concerned leader, Mormon, who wrote, "I was without hope, for I knew the judgments of the Lord which should come upon them; for they repented not of their iniquities, but did struggle for their lives without calling upon that Being who created them" (Mormon 5:2).
4. Especially in these latter-days; see D&C 18:11–12, 14; 19:21; 34:5–6; 43:20; 133:16–17.
5. "The first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Articles of Faith 1:4). See also D&C 39:6; 84:27; 138:19.
6. See Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 4:8.
7. See Revelation 2:16.
8. Mark 1:15; see also Matthew 4:17.
9. Luke 13:3.
10. The word *repent* (to teach the doctrine of repentance) in any of its forms (*repent, repentance, repented, repenteth, and so on*) appears 72 times in the King James Version of the Bible and 68 times in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. In the Book of Mormon, the word *repent* in any of its forms appears 360 times.
11. 3 Nephi 11:38. Another example is "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 12:19).
12. See D&C 1; 3; 5–6; 10–11; 13–16; 18–20; 29; 33–36; 39; 42–45; 49–50; 53–56; 58; 63–64; 66; 68; 75; 84; 90; 93; 98; 104; 107; 109; 117; 124; 133; 136; 138.
13. *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (1987); "repent," 999.
14. See 1 John 1:9; Mosiah 26:29; D&C 61:2; 64:7.
15. D&C 58:43. If no other person has been offended, confession should be prayerfully offered to God. He who hears in secret may reward openly (see Matthew 6:4, 6, 18; 3 Nephi 13:4, 6, 18).
16. See D&C 107:73–74.
17. 2 Nephi 31:13; Jacob 6:5; Mosiah 7:33; 3 Nephi 10:6; 12:24; 18:32.
18. See Mosiah 4:2–3.

19. Isaiah 1:18.
20. D&C 19:15–17.
21. In the minds of some people, the word *repent* also conjures up terms like *penalty* and *penalize*, which connote punishment. If they are not guilty of punishable sin, they may reason that they have no need to repent.
22. President Spencer W. Kimball said: “There is a prevalent, perhaps subconscious, feeling that the Lord designed repentance only for those who commit murder or adultery or theft or other heinous crimes. This is of course not so. If we are humble and desirous of living the gospel we will come to think of repentance as applying to everything we do in life, whether it be spiritual or temporal in nature. Repentance is for every soul who has not yet reached perfection” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball*, 37). See also 1 John 1:8; Mosiah 4:29–30.
23. D&C 68:25; emphasis added.
24. *Metanoeo*, μετανοεω, was used in the Greek text of the Lord’s statements in Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15; and Luke 13:3. The same term was used by Peter in Acts 2:38; 3:19; and 8:22.
25. In Matthew 17:2 and Mark 9:2, *transfigured* was translated from *metamorphoo*, meaning “change of form.”
26. In Ephesians 4:23, *mind* was translated from the Greek *nous*.
27. In Luke 1:77; Romans 2:20; and 2 Corinthians 6:6, *knowledge* was translated from *gnos* or *gnosis*. *Gnos*, when preceded by the negative indicator *a-*, means “lack of knowledge,” as in *agnostic*. In Acts 17:23, *unknown* was translated from *agnostos*, and *ignorantly* was translated from *agnoeo*.
28. In Matthew 12:18 and Romans 8:5, *spirit* was translated from the Greek *pneuma*.
29. In Acts 17:25, *breath* was translated from the Greek *pnos*.
30. Mosiah 2:21.
31. See 3 Nephi 27:21, 27.
32. Alma 37:35–36.
33. Alma 5:14.
34. See John 3:3, 7; Mosiah 27:25; Alma 5:49; 7:14; Moses 6:59.
35. See Moroni 10:32.
36. See Galatians 6:7–8.
37. See Judges 13:7; Luke 1:15; D&C 89:5, 7–9.
38. See Matthew 5:27–28; Alma 38:12; 3 Nephi 12:27–28; D&C 42:23.
39. See Romans 8:5–6.
40. See Alma 38:11; D&C 121:37.
41. See John 13:15; 1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Peter 2:21; 2 Nephi 31:16; 3 Nephi 18:16; Mormon 7:10.
42. See D&C 121:45.
43. See D&C 85:3.
44. See Philippians 4:8; Articles of Faith 1:13.
45. Mosiah 3:19.
46. D&C 138:57–59; see also vv. 30–34.
47. D&C 128:18.
48. *Children’s Songbook*, 60.
49. See D&C 27:9; 110:14–15; 128:18; 138:48.
50. See D&C 2:2–3; 132:19; 138:47–48; Joseph Smith—History 1:39.