A Charles H. Spurgeon Response to Current Evangelicalism’s Lost Doctrine of Repentance

By

Bradley D. Johnson

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Reformed Theological Seminary in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

APPROVED:
Thesis Advisor: __________________________
                    Ken McMullen

RTS Virtual President: ______________________
                        Andrew J. Peterson, Ph.D.

October 16, 2006
This work is dedicated first and foremost to Julie, the wife of my youth
to my son, Kyle, and my daughter, Taylor.

Thank you for your sacrifices.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent.”

-- Acts 17:30b

Acts 17 records Paul preaching the gospel to a group of first century Athenians on Mars Hill. The group is much like what currently resides in America in the 21st century. Modern Americans relish the concept of a supreme being, but fail to realize and know the one true God. Most think about God, talk about God, and sing about God, but, unfortunately, they have created a false god from within their own heart. Their spiritual state remains, consequently, unconverted and in danger of judgment. The Athenians raised an altar with the inscription “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.” America should erect an altar with the Greek inscription, because God is, likewise, mostly unknown in this culture.

The reason this phenomenon has occurred is that God’s full gospel has been compromised in America’s evangelical circles. Simple faith in Jesus Christ has become the sole gospel cry. The biblical gospel, on the other hand, carries with it the dual command of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ alone, resulting in converted lives that bear God-honoring fruit. The doctrine of repentance is mostly forgotten and largely ignored by the clergy, but that does not release them from their responsibility to seek, understand, live, and proclaim repentance toward God, along with faith in His Son. The “times of ignorance” have ceased (Acts 17:30a), and God has stifled the excuses. Mankind will ultimately be

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1 The NASB version will be used throughout the thesis unless otherwise noted.
held accountable by God Himself to His Truth – that is, the resurrected Jesus Christ and His word (Mark 1:1; 8:38). The matter of repentance carries with it consequences that affect a soul’s standing before God both now in this earthly life, and in one’s eternal abode whether with or without God.

Current evangelicalism’s neglect of Acts 17:30, and similar verses (i.e. Acts 11:18; Luke 24:47, etc.), which contain the command of repentance unto life will be investigated. The study will attempt to fully uncover the problems that exist and the reasons for them. Three of the most popular preachers in America today will be evaluated for how well they know and teach the true gospel message. The gospel message referred to is that through repentance and faith, by God’s grace, a person can be saved from his natural sinful state, his particular sins, and his eternal damnation. The difficult subject of post-conversion works will also be broached, as the study seeks to portray God’s gospel in its entirety.

The focus will then turn to the late, but always relevant, Charles H. Spurgeon for answers and remedies to what ails the gospel message today. Charles H. Spurgeon was selected for various reasons, but mainly because of his astute working knowledge of the Scriptures, and the effectiveness of his practical preaching. He saw trouble on the horizon because of the trends during his lifetime; therefore, he did all in his power to stand for the Truth. The lackluster state of today’s gospel message, and evangelicalism in general, would not have surprised him in the least. Spurgeon’s works have been a popular study recently by many serious Bible scholars who desire to learn what made him so special.

Initially, there will be a brief review of the history of repentance within the Protestant church. This will aid in the understanding of how vitally important the doctrine of repentance is to the true Church. The cultural and theological tendencies of today and the
Spurgeon era in 19th century England will then be compared to demonstrate the relation between the two cultures. This will verify in the reader’s mind the relevance of looking to one of the past great preachers from a time not long ago. It is with hope that this project will be used by God to lead pastors and church leaders back to a serious acquaintance with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*Ninety-five Thesis*

The doctrine of repentance has led to some of the most divisive battles throughout the Church age. Martin Luther took on Rome because of the Mother Church’s doctrine of repentance, which included the indulgences. His opposition led to the *Ninety-five Theses* being crafted and nailed to the Wittenberg church doors in 1517. Luther’s first of ninety-five theses stated, “When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said ‘Repent,’ He called for the entire life of believers to be one of penitence.” One may quickly conclude that Luther was dogmatic about the doctrine. Bernhard Lohse summarized Luther’s thoughts on repentance, “The consequence that Luther drew from the New Testament is that repentance and faith are synonymous: a faith that does not include repentance ignores the radicality of sinful existence. A repentance that is not inseparably bound to faith becomes ‘performance’ and leads to ‘works-righteousness.’”¹ Luther’s final two theses are also pertinent to the study. Theses Ninety-four and Ninety-five state, “Christians should be exhorted to be zealous to follow Christ, their Head, through penalties, deaths, and hells; and let them thus be more confident of entering heaven through many tribulations rather than

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¹ Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 102.
through a false assurance of peace.” Martin Luther placed his earthly life in peril because he knew this doctrine was worth dying for. Today’s Church can learn much about repentance from this bold man whom God used to change Christianity and the face of western civilization.

Westminster Confession of Faith

The Larger Catechism was penned by the Westminster Divines in 1648. In answer to Question 152, “What doth every sin deserve at the hands of God?” they responded, “Every sin, even the least, being against the sovereignty, goodness, and holiness of God, and against his righteous law, deserveth his wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come; and cannot be expiated but by the blood of Christ.” The next question (Q. 153) asked, “What doth God require of us, that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us by reason of the transgression of the law?” Take note of the order of actions in their answer: “He requireth of us repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and the diligent use of the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his meditations.”

The very same year the Divines also wrote The Shorter Catechism for less mature Christians. In answer to Question 87, “What is repentance unto life?” they responded, “[It] is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.”

Chapter Fifteen of The Westminster Confession of Faith is entirely devoted to the subject of repentance unto life. It offers great insight, and should be studied more thoroughly than time constraints in this study permit. Two particular points of interest in the chapter will be

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3 Ibid., 246. Emphasis added.
4 Ibid., 311.
included: Point five warns, “Men ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every man’s duty to endeavour to repent of his particular sins, particularly.”\(^5\) Another point worth noting is that they implore all true ministers of Christ to preach repentance along with faith.\(^6\)

**Current Works**

Two of the best current works available on the subject of repentance were written by Dr. James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible, The Master’s Seminary; and Richard V. Peace, Professor of Evangelism and Spiritual Formation at Fuller Theological Seminary. Dr. Rosscup wrote the paper, *The Relation of Repentance to Salvation and the Christian Life*, for the Evangelical Theological Society in 1990. It is a concise work, written in the midst of the hotly contested Lordship Salvation debate, which covers the meaning of repentance in both the Old and New Testaments. Dr. Peace wrote *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve*. The two chapters “Conversion Themes in Mark’s Gospel: Response, Faith, Repentance,” and, “Conversion Themes in Mark’s Gospel: Discipleship” are some of the most insightful materials concerning repentance available. This scholar is indebted to these two men for their fine work and clear communication of the meaning and necessity of true biblical repentance.

**James E. Rosscup**

James Rosscup immediately distinguishes the biblical definition of repentance in his article. He says that scholars, “Basically agree that the word *metanoeo* in the NT bears the root idea, ‘change the mind’ or ‘have an after thought.’”\(^7\) Theologians’ views diverge from

\(^5\) Ibid., 67.
\(^6\) Ibid., 65.
that point onward. He summarizes some of the most notorious thoughts on the matter. One camp believes that repentance is simply a change of attitude, emotion, and will in reaction to ungodly things; but, it stops short of any type of commitment. They believe that a commitment to God, and subsequent life change, constitutes a work on their behalf, which, in their view, is opposed to the pure gospel message of justification by faith alone. On the other hand, an opposing group views repentance as occurring with faith during the salvation process. They see the doctrine of “justification by faith alone” in a different light; and they view repentance as a necessity, while believing that, “The Bible presents this as wholly compatible with the unit of faith/repentance drawing within its reality an element of new allegiance, commitment, purpose, desire, submission, inclination now to go in God’s way.”

This group sees faith and repentance as fruit being produced by the work of God within one’s soul. Rosscup clarifies the latter stance, “It is faith – one condition – which has within its genuineness the spiritual aspect of repentance, a turning away from sin and a turning to God and His values. God, in graciously giving a new heart by His regenerating work, enlivens the sinner, who was helpless in himself, to turn from a spirit of self-serving loyalty to sin to a new direction of loyalty, now to God.” Rosscup thoroughly evaluated the views of both camps, and reached the conclusion that the latter view was more biblical; and therefore, should be accepted.

**Richard V. Peace**

Mark 1:15 says, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Richard V. Peace, in his above mentioned book, exegeted this

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8 Ibid., 2.
9 Ibid., 2.
10 Ibid., 22.
command of Jesus Christ, studied the disciples’ lives with Jesus Christ, and then reached these important conclusions:

Mark says two things here about repentance. First, understanding is foundational to repentance (just as it is to faith, as he demonstrated in unit two). Without understanding, a proper response to Jesus is not possible. Understanding is that which makes it possible to respond to Jesus. It is the motive power. Hence it is not surprising that the whole Gospel of Mark is structured around the unfolding understanding on the part of the disciples as to who Jesus is. They need to understand clearly who he is in order to reorient their thinking. Second, new understanding requires the healing touch of Jesus. It is this that enables a person to go beyond his or her cultural assumptions and religious commitments. In the end, it is the Holy Spirit who opens eyes, unclogs ears, loosens tongues, and softens hearts.  

The same holds true for people today - they must hear instruction about Jesus, hear instruction about their responsibilities to Him, and be encouraged to devote their lives to Him. People must acknowledge that it is God alone who makes salvation through faith and repentance possible. After counting the costs of following Christ, they must then devote themselves totally to the King of kings, Jesus Christ.

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CHAPTER THREE

A CONCISE BIBLICAL STUDY OF REPENTANCE

Repentance in the Old Testament

Genesis 15:6 shows that in the midst of the Lord pledging a covenant with Abram, He accounted Abram’s belief in Him as righteousness. The Hebrew *aman* for “believed” means simply “to trust,” and also “to turn to the right.” Abram was justified by God, and became a saved man only after trusting in Him. This verse is held by at least one theologian as a key verse in the Old Testament for two reasons: First, it is evidence for the salvation message of justification by faith. Second, it proves the doctrine of the unity of believers between the two dispensations.\(^1\) Abram had yet to be circumcised, and the law was still 400 years away from being encoded; but, his faith had brought him salvation. The same has always held true for those who have trusted in the Lord. The gospel message of salvation by faith is as relevant for the Church today as it was for Abram several millennia ago.

Second Kings 17:13-14 shows that God was commanding that the people turn from their evil ways, and keep the commandments and statutes. The people refused to listen, hardened their necks, and, “[They] did not believe in the Lord their God.” Here, one can

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see the relationship between turning and believing. A command was proffered to “turn” from their evil way. The command comes from the Hebrew shub, meaning repent, or turn back, or away from. The Israelites’ refusal to “turn” correlated directly with their unbelief in the Lord. These people were the unsaved children of Israel.

Second Chronicles 7:14 shows that God told Solomon that the Israelites had to humble themselves, pray, seek His face, and turn from their evil ways before He would forgive their sins, and therefore save them. Once again, the word for “turn” is the Hebrew word shub. God commanded the people to repent in order to be forgiven.

Ezekiel 3:19 warns, “Yet if you have warned the wicked and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself.” There is no forgiveness, and thus, no salvation without a “turning,” or, in other words, “repenting.” Ezekiel 18:23 finds the Lord asking, “Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked . . . rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?” A moment later in verse 30 He warns, “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct . . . Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you.” The Hebrew Scriptures hold true to the pure gospel message of salvation coming through repentance and faith towards God alone.

**Repentance in the New Testament**

The first words of Jesus in Mark’s gospel, once again, are, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mk 1:15) This is a straight-forward command by the Savior. The charge is to all people of all time everywhere with no exceptions. The Greek word for repent is metanoeo, which means “to change one’s mind,” and “to have an after care.” Jesus is telling the sinner to change his mind, to believe
the good news of Jesus Christ, and to carefully guard and protect his new mind. This message is given repeatedly throughout the New Testament; and Scripture never teaches otherwise. The command has no time limits, no cultural constraints, and no exceptions.

Paul gives great insight into repentance (metanoeo) in 2 Corinthians 7:8-11. He initially wrote First Corinthians to the believers chastising them for allowing an immoral man to remain in their church. Paul confesses that it was hard for him to write, but he has now heard from Titus that the letter led them to repentance. Paul rejoiced because the Lord used the letter to bring them metanoeo. The repentance Paul is speaking of is the same repentance that brings a person salvation (v.10). The people had vindicated themselves through true biblical repentance, by God’s grace, through Paul’s instruction. The same pattern must continue today, as the Lord expects church leaders to recognize error within the church and call the people to metanoeo.
CHAPTER FOUR

A COMPARISON BETWEEN 19th CENTURY ENGLAND
AND CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

Cultural Comparison

Modernism, Romanticism, Existentialism

Modernism had been the primary cultural philosophy of the western world for roughly 200 years. It began during the Enlightenment in the 18th century. The worldview infected the human race with the belief that mankind could collectively understand everything in the universe. Man, without help from a subjective faith, could understand all he needed to understand in order to make the world a better place to live. Matters that failed to have empirical or rational evidence were disregarded as irrelevant. Absolute truth was the goal of the Enlightenment, but modernity’s definition of absolute truth only involved man’s five senses accepting what could be rationally proven through science. The Bible’s historical claims of the supernatural, from creation and angels to the virgin birth of Christ and the Holy Spirit’s saving work, were rejected out of contempt for all things unrecognizable to the human senses. Supernatural explanations were also rejected by scientists who were attempting to explain the beginning of the universe.
Modernism flamed out and reached its ultimate end in the latter half of the 20th century. An anti-modernist movement, with foundations built on the combination of 19th century romanticism and early 20th century existentialism, progressed through the elite philosophers of the world, and eventually into the institutions of higher learning in the western world. The strict objective nature of modernism led to the more subjective romanticism. Gene Edward Veith says, “Rather than seeing nature as a vast machine, the romantics saw nature as a living organism. Rather than believing with the Deists that God is far away and detached, the romantics believed that God is close at hand and intimately involved in the physical world.”

The romantics shied away from strict reliance upon Scriptures because they felt it was too objective. They also trusted more on emotions for daily guidance.

Existentialism passed materialism off as inhuman, but rose to give the materialist meaning by allowing him to develop purpose for his own life. Gene Veith says, “This meaning, however, has no validity for anyone else. Everyone must determine his or her own meaning, which must remain private, personal, and unconnected to any sort of objective truth.”

Veith went so far as to say that existentialism provided the rationale for contemporary relativism. The individualized aspect of existentialism makes each belief system unique and every bit as valid as any other; therefore, one person has no business of imposing his belief on anyone else. This view is the basis for what today’s culture knows as postmodernism.

Modernism’s fruits include many people who still see life as being made up of objective bits of scientifically proven facts. They are still longing for the perfect society to

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2 Ibid., 38.
rise up out of a nation that espouses its tenants. Their religion is basically Deism, 
masquerading in liberal theology, which is interwoven throughout most Protestant 
denominations. Modernism also opened the door for atheism. Science feeds their senses 
with theorems directed at undermining most aspects of the Christian worldview.

**Postmodernism**

Postmodernism’s early fruits include a loss of concern for the knowledge of truth. 
The backlash of modernism became the backbone of postmodernism. The idea of an 
absolute truth that can be discovered by man is reprehensible to a postmodernist. All truth 
became relative, and each person’s worldview became his own truth for his own world. 
According to postmodernism, every individual lives in his own truth bubble where no other 
worldviews are allowed to enter. When an opposing worldview is pricking the bubble the 
postmodernists unite to attack the intolerant offender.

Postmodernism encourages people to become their own gods, in a sense. They 
create all of their individual ideals, morals, and life activities based on their own 
preferences. No one tells anyone what to believe, with one exception to the rule: that all 
postmodernists are to reject anyone who holds a religious system that makes claims for 
possessing the one and only absolute truth. That fact leaves Christianity and Judaism at the 
top of the hit list, along with Islam and other dogmatic religions. Postmodernism is now the 
prevailing cultural paradigm in the United States of America, as the last generation of 
modernists, the baby-boomers, crawls toward their shameful end.

Today’s modernist holdovers look to their systematic study of nature to answer all 
of the great philosophical questions of life. Truth is whatever scientists and psychiatrists 
make it out to be through their latest “discoveries.” They reject the inerrancy and
infallibility of Scripture, especially in the areas of the supernatural. Therefore, those who are true modernists, and those who have been influenced by the modernist mantra, propagate their own style of truth. They have rejected the eternal truth of Scripture for the limited, theoretical truth of the universe.

Postmodernists look inside themselves to answer all of the great philosophical questions of life. They gather their individualized beliefs from the various religions that sweep the landscape. All knowledge is sifted through one’s beliefs and ideals, leaving it relative to his interpretation. The printed language is especially attacked by postmodernists because they view language as slippery and changeable. They deconstruct writings, such as the Bible, and become self-appointed interpreters of the work. They reject the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture, because the Bible claims to be God’s objective truth for all time and all people everywhere. Therefore, post-modernists despise objective truth, and all who espouse it.

Few people actually hold the extreme positions of either of these worldviews, but their greatest apologists are in control of America’s public school systems. The children and young adults who attend public schools are slowly but surely led in the direction that questions truth. The students have been taught that there is no objective truth; therefore, the young minds of America are not trained to seek after the highest truth. Their truth has become the belief that there is no truth to seek after; because, all things are relative to their own personal interpretation.

The biblical truth is that there is one correct worldview – the Christian worldview. The Christian worldview leaves no room for individual interpretation of God and the universal truths of the universe (John 14:6; 2 Peter 1:20-21). All other worldviews,
including the religious based systems that counter Christianity, are wrong. It may be for different reasons that one from another rejects the Christian view, but each who fails to hold it has rejected the Bible’s claims as the ultimate truth.

**Religious Life Comparison**

If one casually observed Sunday mornings in England in the 19th century, they would have concluded that Christianity was thriving. Iain Murray offers his insight, “Protestant Christianity was more or less the national religion; Sunday was strictly observed; the Scriptures were respected; and, apart from the untouched thousands in some of the larger cities, church-going was the general custom.”

Upon listening to the content of the messages that were taught, however, it would have been concluded that things were not in such great shape after all. In English churches, “There was no scarcity of eloquence and culture in the pulpits, but there was a marked absence of the kind of preaching that broke men’s hearts.”

The preachers were intellectually able to preach eloquent sermons, but they lacked conviction about biblical truth. There was little in the way of challenging expository preaching for the 19th century Englishman.

The spiritual lethargy of Charles H. Spurgeon’s England was caused by modernism. Marxism, Darwinism, and liberal theology had made great headway into the minds of the Englishmen. Charles H. Spurgeon was not blind to the unholy wave, either, as Iain Murray shares, “The explanation of Spurgeon’s attitude is to be found in his assessment of the rise of Higher Criticism within the Protestant Churches. In many spheres of knowledge the 19th century witnessed spectacular advances: in science, philosophy, languages, and history there appeared to be a renaissance of learning and a new concern for accuracy and progress.

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4 Ibid., 21.
In this effort to advance, *traditional concepts were questioned, old sources were critically examined*, and genuine progress was made.\(^5\)* The Bible, along with its wonderful orthodox doctrines, had become the object of criticism. Christianity had gone out of vogue during Spurgeon’s lifetime.

The English people became more inclined to seek worldly knowledge instead of Scriptural knowledge, as Murray shares, “The mood of the age was against creeds of any sort, and evangelicals, with their already diluted faith, succumbed in large numbers to the idea that clear-cut doctrinal positions were ‘unchristian’ in their tendency.”\(^6\) Liberalism originated with the theologically elite, eventually made its way to the pulpits, and finally found a home in the minds of most of England’s population. Iain Murray, an expert on this era, claims to have discovered where the fault lay, “In expanding these statements it is first necessary to show that the prevalent doctrinal outlook in the 1850’s was not Calvinistic . . . but rather Arminian.”\(^7\) He concluded that the loss of reformed doctrines led to the demise of strong doctrinal Christianity, “. . . And subsequently in scores of churches higher critical views were to replace the evangelical faith. . . The decline of Calvinism was thus clearly related to the growth of liberal theology.”\(^8\) According to Murray, blame for the liberal takeover of the church can be laid on the head of the Arminian theology that pervaded English churches in the 1800’s.\(^9\)

\(^5\) Ibid., 140. Emphasis added.
\(^6\) Ibid., 188.
\(^7\) Ibid., 53.
\(^8\) Ibid., 189.
\(^9\) In this study liberties have been taken with the use of the term Arminianism because of the limited space available to define its tenants in full. Arminianism, then, includes all soteriological beliefs that fall short of the 5 points of Calvinism (*i.e.* Semi-Pelagianism, 3 ½ point Calvinism, 4-point Calvinism, *etc.*). The point being is that the neglect of even one of these crucial points leads to a flawed theology, and therefore, a flawed soteriology. As this occurs, sometimes sooner or sometimes later, the true gospel breaks down and eventually becomes a remnant of its former self.
The fruits of liberalism were reported at the end of the 19th century, “Attendance at places of worship is declining, and reverence for holy things is vanishing; and we solemnly believe this to be largely attributable to the skepticism which has flashed from the pulpit and spread among the people. . . . In meeting houses holding a thousand, or twelve hundred, or fifteen hundred, places once packed to the ceiling with ardent hearers, how small are such numbers now!”\(^{10}\) The devastating effects of modernism were realized in the English churches; and the consequences of bad theology would soon cross the Atlantic as America’s Protestant churches would reap what they sowed, as well.

Iain Murray uncovered a more specific problem that was directly related to Arminianism, and later liberalism. He discovered that, “The apostolic phrase ‘repentance toward God’ dropped out of common usage and ‘deciding for Christ’ became the new comprehensive term.”\(^{11}\) Arminianism and liberalism created a domino effect that tumbled the true gospel, and today the American church also finds itself without a biblical gospel message. The great reformed doctrines have vanished, stone cold liberalism remains, the quest for absolute truth is over, and the biblical salvation message has disappeared. The current American church finds itself in a desperate state of affairs.

Preachers have become ineffective because the pulpits from 19th century England to 21st century America have been left void of salvific truth. Decisionism has taken over the church’s evangelism efforts. Cheap grace is assumed, as easy believism is used by most pastors to call the lost to salvation. The call to real discipleship is left meaningless because altar calls and emotional pleas are tools used to persuade people into the family of God. The call for total commitment to Christ has almost disappeared altogether. The few preachers

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\(^{10}\) Murray, 142.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 233.
who are bold enough to stick their necks out by challenging sinners with the true gospel are quickly attacked and run out. One can pray and hope for God to move upon America’s churches, and bring them back to spiritual health. Three popular preachers in America have been chosen to be evaluated for orthodoxy, helping to understand the predicament that faces current American evangelicalism.
CHAPTER FIVE

REPENTANCE IN THE GOSPEL OF AMERICA’S MOST POPULAR EVANGELICAL PREACHERS

Joel Osteen Critique

Biography

Joel Osteen preaches to 35,000 people weekly at Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas. He also tours the nation and speaks at some of its largest indoor venues, drawing hundreds of thousands of people into the arenas. Osteen’s website mentions that, because of the faithful givers to the ministry, “Thousands receive salvation.” He also added that because of them [the givers], “Over 100,000 people made decisions for the Lord during 25 special events in 16 cities.”\(^1\) That would be an average of 4,000 people becoming “saved” at each of his speaking engagements. He also reaches millions on his TBN television ministry. His influence is phenomenal, leaving one to question the reasons for his popularity. There is no doubt that Joel Osteen is a wonderful individual with a caring heart. He has a charming and sweet down-home disposition that is inviting and comforting. He is a wonderful son, husband, father, friend, and leader making those who follow him genuinely feel like part of his family.

The rapid ascent of Joel Osteen as a national religious leader proves the willingness of the masses to forego orthodox biblical teaching. Mr. Osteen’s credentials lack any type of formal theological training, and that fact becomes readily apparent in his writings. His ignorance, neglect, and heretical misuse of Scripture are evident as he takes spiritual truths from the Bible and gives them material applications. Mr. Osteen’s book Your Best Life Now was written in order that, “We can live at our full potential right now.” He offers a seven step life-enhancing guide for everyone’s benefit. The life-enhancements refer to material items, job status, power, relationships, health, and last but not least, the spiritual life. He is a self-professed unashamed propagator of the health and wealth gospel.

Osteen quickly charges those who are learning his methods of success to willingly “Change your thinking.” Amazingly, that is exactly where repentance begins – a person changing his thinking. Has Mr. Osteen found the secret to success? Are the millions who are purchasing his book receiving insight on how to truly make their lives count through biblical repentance? Osteen, at one point, states high claim for his writings. He boasts that, “This book is your personal lighthouse, beaming truth into your life, saying you must change your course.” Mr. Osteen’s words are right – one must change his course; but an investigation into what part of one’s thinking he deems necessary to change is enlightening.

You need not go far to discover the change that he proposes must occur in your thinking in order to open the storehouse of God’s blessings upon you. Osteen, here speaking of winning beauty pageant events, making better decisions, increasing one’s finances, and getting promotions at work, says, “To experience this immeasurable favor,

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3 Ibid., 4.
4 Ibid., 163.
you must rid yourself of that small-minded thinking and start expecting God’s blessings, start anticipating promotion and supernatural increase. You must conceive it in your heart and mind before you can receive it.”⁵ According to Osteen, your best life is that simple – you must conceive and receive, in order to find success.

Joel Osteen wants you to create an atmosphere of faith and success in your own life. He wants you to allow Jesus to fill the old wineskins with new wine, but your negative thinking prevents the Lord from fulfilling what He desires for your life. Mr. Osteen insists that God is striving to show people His “incredible favor.”⁶ He claims that one’s self-defeating thoughts keep God’s blessings from falling upon him; so, he tells the reader to release his negative thoughts. Osteen adds, “Understand, God is constantly trying to plant new seeds in your heart. He’s constantly trying to get you to conceive, to give up antiquated ideas and spawn new bursts of creativity within. The key is to believe, to let the seed take root so it can grow.”⁷ By all accounts, according to Mr. Osteen, God is limited by a person’s attitude. He is saying that God cannot work in someone’s life until that person thinks correctly.

On Belief

Joel Osteen teaches that the key to God’s blessings falling upon a person is simply to “believe.” Of course, that begs the question, “In what must one believe?” Jesus clearly says that one is to believe in the One whom He (the Father) sent (Jn 6:29); and also, in case there is a question about who that is, Jesus said, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.” (Jn 6:35) Contrary to the gospel proclamation, Mr. Osteen informs the reader exactly what he wants you to believe.

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⁵ Ibid., 6. Emphasis added.
⁶ Ibid., 6.
⁷ Ibid., 9.
in. Observe his words carefully as he redefines the biblical concept of “belief,” in order to support his unorthodox theological system. He says that if it is more money you want, then you should be “believing for increase;” and if it is a promotion at work that you desire, then you should be “believing to excel at your job;” and if it is being a better leader or parent, then you should be “believing to be a more effective leader, or better parent.”

Osteen does not bother teaching true biblical belief, but he stresses a simple belief in God, and a more passionate belief that God will grant you your desires. In reality, Osteen’s “belief” is simply the humanistic power of positive thinking.

Mr. Osteen exhorts you to “enlarge your vision,” and to, “Get rid of those old wineskins. Get rid of that small-minded thinking and start thinking as God thinks. Think Big. Think increase. Think abundance. Think more than enough.” Contrary to that, it is impossible to think how God thinks; because His thoughts are so much higher than human thoughts (Is 55:8-9). Osteen’s remarks are simply ways of saying that what you have is not good enough. He gives several examples in his book that can only be interpreted as a person coveting the best things in this life, such as a beautiful home, a great job, and excellent health. He boasts shamelessly about his wife coveting their neighbor’s house, and how his young son coveted his father’s ministry in the large venue in Houston. Joel Osteen’s ignorance of Scripture is proven as he totally dismisses God’s Tenth Commandment.

**On the Power of Positive Thinking**

Joel Osteen teaches that power may be generated from “thinking;” but that one may also harness power from his words. Therefore, a person not only possesses faith, but the

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8 Ibid., 10.
9 Ibid., 11.
ability to “speak” whatever he wants into existence. Mr. Osteen exhorts, “Friend, there is a
miracle in your mouth.” He says that one must, “Quit worrying and complaining about the
obstacle, and start speaking to it. Quit complaining about poverty and lack and start
declaring, ‘God supplies all of my needs in abundance. . .’ Quit complaining that nothing
good ever happens to you and start declaring, ‘Everything I touch prospers and succeeds.’”
Since these results fail to occur to the majority of people who actually attempt it; all
indications point conclusively that this is false teaching.

The reason for investigating Osteen’s thoughts on this particular subject can be
discovered in this statement: “The moment you speak something out, you give birth to it.
This is a spiritual principle, and it works whether what you are saying is good or bad,
positive or negative.”10 The logical consequence of accepting this principle is that if a man
believes in salvation through Christ, and he speaks the words, “Jesus, I’m sorry for my sins,
and I make you my Lord and Savior,” Jesus would be required to instantaneously enter the
man’s life and save him. According to Mr. Osteen’s theology, man literally calls the shots,
while the Godhead is subject to him. Mr. Osteen boldly states that, “God has already done
everything He’s going to do.”11 He is saying that God already gave man the Bible, and that
it is full of promises to him; therefore, what the man does with those promises is totally up
to him. The man who conceives and believes the promises has a “God” who is obligated to
automatically furnish his demands. He teaches, “The ball is now in your court. If you want
success, if you want wisdom, if you want to be prosperous and healthy, you’re going to
have to do more than meditate and believe; you must boldly declare words of faith and
victory over yourself and your family.”\textsuperscript{12} The principles that Osteen espouses touch every part of a person’s life, including the material, physical, emotional, and spiritual. In summary, Joel Osteen believes that when a person conceives blessings in his mind, believes them with all of his heart, and then proclaims them with his mouth, God will grant him his desires.

**On Faith**

Osteen also advises people to raise their level of expectancy. In other words, one must “repent” from low expectations to a high level of expectations. He informs people to program their mind for success. He wants people to break out of their self-imposed prisons that they live in; and he insists that a sure-fire way to accomplish that is through faith. Note how Osteen changes the biblical concept of “faith,” as he earlier changed the biblical concept of “belief.” He says, “You must look through your ‘eyes of faith’ and start seeing yourself as happy, healthy, and whole.”\textsuperscript{13} Living a simple and satisfied life is apparently out of Osteen’s picture for anyone’s life; as he teaches that one should always desire more of whatever they have, or do not have. Osteen offers no biblical support for the teaching that a person should expect to be blessed by God more than he already has been.

One develops the belief, from reading *Your Best Life Now*, that being where you are is never good enough. You should always strive for something better. Osteen states that God’s “dream” for your life is so much better and bigger than you can even imagine.\textsuperscript{14} He claims that a person limits God by thinking that they can no longer move up the company ladder, or that by thinking that they have to accept whatever disease they may have. He said that God wants the best for you, so he exhorts, “God can do anything, if you believe.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 132.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 15. Emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 22.
He can do anything, *if you will simply stop limiting Him in your thinking.*"\(^{15}\) Evidently, Joel Osteen believes that God will not, or cannot, move on one’s life *unless* he authorizes Him through mentally claiming what is his. He teaches that, “God is limited only by our lack of faith.”\(^{16}\) If that is the case, then the biblical God is not the sovereign God true Christians think that He is, because He is limited strictly to what humans “conceive and believe.” According to Osteen, God is anxiously waiting for each person to mentally accept and verbally declare that, because of His favor in their life, they can ask for anything, and get it. When they reach that level of “faith” He pours out His favor upon them. The “conceive and believe” theory is considered a spiritual law by Osteen, in the same sense that physical laws work within our universe.

Joel Osteen is actually close with his noetic teaching. The mind *does* think wrong in its natural condition, and the mind *must* change its thinking. That exercise is repentance in its most basic root form. Osteen’s version of this truth, though, is, “If you will change your thinking, God can change your life.”\(^{17}\) That statement actually puts repentance before regeneration in his soteriology. “Repentance,” in Joel Osteen’s system, is a person turning from his negative thoughts of his current circumstances to thoughts that elevate his dreams and desires. He adds no biblical word studies to support his fictitious assertions.

**On the Spiritual State of Humanity**

Osteen’s views on humanity also surface in *Your Best Life Now*. He correctly teaches that people were created in God’s image; but he rapidly departs from Scripture, declaring that, “Before we were ever formed, He programmed us to live abundant lives, to be happy, healthy, and whole. But when our thinking becomes contaminated, it is no

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 23.  
\(^{16}\) Ibid., 24.  
\(^{17}\) Ibid., 32.
longer in line with God’s word. . . You must change your thinking. Understand, you are not defective.”18 The biblical truth is that humans are worse than defective - they are spiritually dead. There is no God-pleasing meritorious thing in any soul. The concept of total depravity, or the fact that humans cannot do anything in their natural power to obtain God’s saving favor, is obviously foreign to Joel Osteen.

Mr. Osteen offers more insight regarding his views of humanity, when he attempts to get the reader to realize that, “We can control our own destinies.”19 He adds that when a person gets “down” because of his circumstances, it is his own fault. He claims, “Actually, your circumstances don’t have you down, your thoughts about your circumstances have you down.” He tells his readers that outside influences should not rob them of their happiness and joy in life, even though they may have lost a loved one, their business, their ministry, or anything else they value.

Osteen believes that people have been granted free reign to live their lives on their own, with little to no outside spiritual influences. Irresistible grace towards God’s elect is definitely discarded as one can surmise after hearing Osteen’s thoughts on the matter. One such view is here quoted, “But we must also understand that God will not change another person’s will. He has given every human being free will to choose which way he or she will go, whether to do right or wrong.”20 One can readily see the heights to which he raises humanity. As to the free will of humanity, Osteen’s plight is consistent with the majority of American evangelicals. They understand the human being to be mostly autonomous in regards to salvation. They assume that every person has been given equal access to Christ and the opportunity for eternal life. This biblical example of a young lady made willing to

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18 Ibid., 114. Emphasis added.
19 Ibid., 103. Emphasis added.
20 Ibid., 178. Emphasis added.
believe in God is sufficient to refute Osteen’s belief on the topic, “A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshipper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.” (Acts 16:14) The Holy Spirit does the same to all people who will believe in the gospel.

Joel Osteen does believe that God is at work, although, to a limited degree. He has the notion that God is busy pouring out material wealth and excellent health on His people. He says that, “God wants to give you the desires of your heart. He wants you to be complete and content.” He apparently is ignoring the biblical teaching regarding a person’s heart, which says that, “It was only on evil continuously.” (Gen 6:5; also see Jer 17:9) Osteen also neglects to mention those who are not as fortunate as he; those who love the Lord in famished lands, ghettos, and hospitals. His foolish teaching, once again, lacks any Scriptural support.

Joel Osteen insists that God wants man to exalt himself, “Self-esteem, then, is that deep-down feeling you have about yourself. . . Unquestionably, a healthy self-image is one of the key factors in the success and happiness of any individual.” Follow Osteen as he continues to elevate his readers, “God wants us to have healthy, positive self-images, to see ourselves as priceless treasures. He wants us to feel good about ourselves. God knows we’re not perfect, that we all have faults and weaknesses; that we all make mistakes. But the good news is that God loves us anyway.” Osteen relies on the unbiblical notion that God loves every single person that has ever existed. Malachi 1:3, in regards to God’s feelings toward Esau, denies the fallacy in no uncertain terms. Osteen fails to give biblical support of this empty declaration, much like his other hollow assertions.

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21 Ibid., 78.
22 Ibid., 56.
23 Ibid., 57.
Take note of how Osteen dismisses the doctrine of total depravity, and therefore cements his position, “You may not be perfect – nobody is! Sure, you’ve got some flaws – we all do! But to be truly free, you must have a healthy respect for yourself in spite of those “imperfections.”

Osteen quickly counsels his reader, in case he had any lingering feelings of remorse for his plight as a sinner, “You may think there is a lot wrong with you, but there is also a lot right with you.” This assertion denies the enormous responsibility people have to the deep introspection of one’s offences against a holy God. Osteen softens sin by using less offensive terms (i.e. flaws, imperfections), which tend to ease a person’s guilt. He attempts to reduce one’s guilt so that the person can attain higher self-esteem. Joel Osteen is battling God within a man’s soul, if that is the case. God uses the conscience to trigger guilt, and to lower an individual’s naturally inflated ego. God’s way brings about spiritual sensitivity, and subsequently, a true repentance; while Osteen’s way brings about spiritual hardness, and subsequently, a false righteousness. Osteen’s teaching is not simply neutral, and therefore harmless; it directly opposes biblical teaching, and causes great harm to God’s ordained process of salvation.

Osteen’s teachings on humanity encourage self-righteousness in an individual. Not once does he talk about using the Bible as the standard for righteousness. Osteen occasionally mentions something resembling sin, such as, “You may not be perfect;” but he throws in a “Nobody is!” He may hint that you have some flaws, but an “Aw shucks, we all do!” justifying statement is issued. This teaching trains the sinner to look horizontally at other people’s sins, instead of looking vertically to God’s holiness. As one hears about his good company in sin (i.e. all people), his plight does not seem so bad after all. This

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24 Ibid., 66.
25 Ibid., 67.
predicament is a classic demonstration of self-righteousness, as each person’s righteousness is held up against humanity, not Scriptural holiness. Joel Osteen, through his biblical ignorance, has laid the groundwork for self-righteousness.

Joel Osteen issues no call for true biblical repentance; and actually worsens the sinner’s position by attempting to comfort him, “You may have made some mistakes in life, but if you have honestly repented and done your best to do right since then, you no longer have to live with guilt and shame.” He calls sin a “mistake” once again. But sin is not simply some mistake. Two better terms would be “transgression,” or, “rebellion against God.” Mistakes can sometimes innocently happen, while sin is premeditated rebellion against the Creator.

**On Repentance**

Osteen does not take the time to define the important term “repentance” for his readers. One reason for that may be that he lacks knowledge of the concept, but ignorance is no excuse. The real reason for this serious error is that Osteen’s theological system would unravel if he called people to true repentance. He would be implying that the person is a helpless sinner in need of a holy God to save him. Repentance is the initial act of man before God whereby man elevates God and His holiness, admits his utter failure in reference to righteousness, and then bows before the Lord in humility. Osteen would never admit that a man is totally depraved, and therefore in desperate need of a Savior. He does call on people to pray and ask for forgiveness; but that contradicts his overall theological system, which has little need for biblical repentance. True repentance is only attained by those who fully understand their utter sinfulness, as well as God’s holiness. Osteen’s
followers have never heard, at least from his mouth, the biblical fact that they are totally lost in sin, and by themselves helpless in the quest for justification. (Rom 3:9-18)

Joel Osteen neglects to call his readers to a deep abiding faith in Christ alone. He neglects to call a person to forsake everything to follow Christ. He neglects to call a person to strive to live in purity. The reason Osteen ignores such important biblical mandates is that he does not believe humans are that bad to begin with. In fact, his teachings imply that humans have divine power in their own minds; and that they can unleash it by simply conceiving whatever they will, believing whatever they will, and then receiving what they have conceived and believed. Osteen unashamedly proclaims, “You will become what you believe.”

Joel Osteen’s heretical teaching is actually much closer to Zen Buddhism than true Christianity.

The findings offer evidence that one’s view of humanity directly correlates with how one views the necessity and extent of repentance. Joel Osteen’s soteriology has no need of repentance, because man has goodness within him. According to Osteen, a person only has to spawn positive thoughts in his own mind, and then spout them out of his mouth, to please God and obtain His blessings. Those actions allow the man to fulfill God’s dream for his life. Osteen teaches that God’s favor rests upon the man who is living his best life now.

On Assurance of Salvation

Joel Osteen and his wife affirm their love for you at the end of Your Best Life Now. He also asks you to pray with him this prayer, “Lord Jesus, I repent of my sins. I ask you to come into my heart. I make you my Lord and Savior.” The latter statement reveals the height that Osteen places mankind, and the depth that he places God. Joel Osteen believes

26 Ibid., 79.
that a man should simply tell Jesus Christ that he is making Him his Lord. He teaches that God obediently responds to the command. He believes that God’s work was finished two thousand years ago; and that salvation is currently up to man, while God only responds to man’s actions. Joel Osteen’s views parallel those of the heretical open theism movement.

Joel Osteen commented earlier in his book that, “Salvation is more than a onetime prayer;” however, he closes in contradictory fashion with this statement, “Friend, if you prayed that simple prayer, I believe you have been ‘born again.’” This contradiction is the perfect example of a dangerous false assurance offered by many leaders in current evangelicalism. It is evident that he has taken over Christ’s position of judging humans for eternal life. Actually, there are no examples in the Bible of someone other than Jesus Christ telling a repentant and faithful sinner that, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” (Lk 7:50) Mere humans do not have the capability to know exactly when the Holy Spirit takes possession of a soul; therefore they should not hinder God’s ordained process of salvation by pretending to know when the person became saved. A person’s salvation is reliant upon God’s timing and work, not a person’s words or works. Only God can judge the salvation of a soul.

*Your Best Life Now* misses the point of salvation altogether. The name of the book itself directs a person to live for this world, while relegating eternity to a mere afterthought. Eternal life becomes no more than an extension of a successful worldly life. Jesus Christ warned true believers in no uncertain terms, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do

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27 Ibid, 212.
28 Ibid, 310.
not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Mat 6:19-21; also, Lk 12:13-34) The proponents of the heretical health and wealth gospel ignore this basic truth of the Christian life altogether.

**Osteen’s Followers**

What do these aforementioned facts say about current evangelicalism? After all, millions flock to his teachings even though he lacks a day in Bible college or seminary. He is the weakest theologian of those critiqued in this study. One is left to wonder where his followers come from. What are the traits of those who espouse such mindless, toothless, and spineless theology? Understanding who he attracts and why he attracts them is simple. First of all, he reaches out to all of the classes and colors in America, because there is not a discriminatory bone in his body. Next, he makes people who have been dragged down by the trials of life feel good about themselves again. He attracts those who love to be encouraged when they are down and out; and who love to be cheered on through the trials and tribulations of life. Thirdly, those who do not particularly like to think too deeply are made to feel right at home under Osteen’s teaching. People who severely lack commitment to Bible study and prayer have their guilt eased, because Osteen’s unchallenging teaching rarely uses Scripture as the authority. Finally, Osteen attracts the worldly people (*i.e.* the materialistic, power-driven, selfish, *etc.*), who he waves on to continue in their self-absorbed world. Is it no wonder that he draws the masses? He panders to the typical American church-goers who possess a semblance of Christianity, but who lack true Christian commitment. These nominalists want their ears tickled, and that is what they receive when they hear Joel Osteen speak. Joel Osteen is the new face for the Pentecostal/Charismatic division of the Protestant faith. The people adore him and his self-
aggrandizing preaching. This is a huge and influential heretical movement which is here to stay, and Joel Osteen’s popularity proves it.

**Bill Hybels’ Critique**

**Biography**

Bill Hybels is the founder of Willow Creek Community Church and Willow Creek Association, which has more than 11,000 member churches. The Association aids local churches with vision, innovations, and tools to increase spiritual and numerical growth. Their website has available everything a pastor needs to plan a service at his church. There is a list of ten choices each for services, sermons, songs, dramas, and even videos. Willow Creek Association is an expertly managed business that provides those who wish to run a Church Growth Movement church everything they need to succeed. Bill Hybels is considered a primary proponent of the Church Growth Movement. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Trinity College. His church has over 18,000 attendees, his conferences draw thousands of church leaders, and he has authored numerous books, many on Christian leadership. He is a dynamic and sincere communicator.

Bill Hybels is a very intelligent man. He understands how to build a vibrant growing church. He has led Willow Creek to begin ministries that have positive effects in their community. Many of his followers make an impact in and around the Chicago area. They witness, they have home Bible studies, and they invite their friends to church. They are Christian activists who enjoy making an impact in society.

A closer look into Willow Creek, however, leaves one wondering why it is so popular. A Willow Creek church service intentionally limits things which can be deemed offensive to a “seeker.” You will find no visible crosses, no hymnals, little teaching against
sin, and only a small amount of teaching on the consequences of sin. The one common attribute of Bill Hybel’s sermons is the limited use of Scripture within. He does say “The Bible says” often, but without exact quoting and referencing. He also uses, and this is true of his books also, many biblical stories to support his teachings. His sermons have many illustrations, both from Scripture and life experiences. The lack of expository preaching in Hybel’s work, though, is bothersome considering the influence he possesses.

Willow Creek’s statement of beliefs is brief, but it is orthodox in what it says. Concerning salvation, it correctly states, “Salvation comes only through God’s saving grace – not human effort – and must be received personally by repentance and faith.” Bill Hybels would be better served, though, to preach according to his statement of belief; and by preaching repentance in a manner that brings it to the forefront of salvation.

**On Evangelism**

Bill Hybels’ evangelism course *Becoming a Contagious Christian* offers valuable insight into his soteriology. A participant in the course is coached to develop his Christian testimony. He writes about his personal life before his conversion, explains his conversion experience, and then “witnesses” about his life change since his conversion. Bill Hybels instructs a witness to use a testimony because he wants the person to witness to the fact of how much better his life is with Christ than without Him. In the model testimony, Hybels has the witness explaining to her friend that her mom had passed on insecurities to her, so she was searching for security and found it in Jesus. She goes on to say that she is now more confident, and has better relationships, and she no longer suffers from fear.²⁹ This is a perfect example of the false felt-needs gospel so prevalent in today’s evangelistic efforts.

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Scripture does not instruct a person to seek God in order that he might experience an improved worldly life. A sinner is first and foremost called to reconcile with God for God’s glory. Scripture does, however, inform the Christian that he will experience certain blessings as fruits of salvation. Bill Hybels basis his evangelism efforts on an unbiblical foundation. His view is formed from the human perspective, not from God’s perspective.

Bill Hybels’ theology can be found in Becoming a Contagious Christian, as well. He says that God is holy, loving, and just. He believes that those facts are why God will pay back those who trouble you (see 2 Thes 1:6). The verse has absolutely nothing to do with salvation, and should not be included. Bill Hybels fails to teach the practical consequences of his earlier affirmation about God. In reality, the fact that God is holy, loving, and just is exactly why He punishes all sinners, not just those who “trouble you.” He also fails to use the proper salvific verses when evangelizing, because he is trying to avoid offending the sinner.

On the State of Humanity

Bill Hybels’ views on humanity also surface in his book. He says that, "We were created good, but became sinful," and he used Romans 3:23 for evidence. The verse easily confuses a sinner because it appears as though each person was created good, and then sinned. A better verse to clarify his point would have been Romans 5:12, which describes Adam's sin and how it passed onto the entire human race. A sinner can then more easily understand his true predicament of being a sinner by nature. Hybels seems to be skirting some tough issues about man's true condition. He goes on to say that man is “spiritually

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30 Ibid., 60.
31 Ibid., 61.
helpless,” or, “morally bankrupt.”  

Bill Hybels also has an interesting sense of calling in his system. He correctly says that Christ is God, who also became man, and offers a verse for that (John 1:1, 14). He said Christ died as our substitute, which is good; but, then he tells the spiritually dead “seeker” that forgiveness is a free gift. Ephesians 2:8-9 is used as support; however, that verse does not say “free” before gift. Hybels chose to ignore the biblical teaching about a seeker forsaking his life and following Jesus (see Mk 10:17-31, “The Rich Young Ruler”). He does not say one has to repent, but only that one has to “respond” to God, and then he quotes John 1:12, "But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." He finishes by saying that, "We must ask Christ to be our ‘forgiver and leader.’” Hybels declines to say that a person must ask Christ to be his Savior and Lord, because of the offense it may cause the sinner. Some of the illustrations near the back of his book give the confusing message that salvation is by works. A sinner is seen crossing a chasm by walking over a cross to God's side, which implies man must do something to get to God. Illustrations such as this fail to give God the full glory for his work in salvation. Becoming a Contagious Christian is representative of most evangelism training methods that are available today, and they should be avoided at all costs.

Bill Hybels seems to be gravitating towards more challenging preaching in his most recent sermons. One particular sermon entitled “A Look at Hell” finds Hybels offering an accurate biblical vision of hell, despite the fact that he rarely quotes Scripture. After a

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32 Ibid., 61.
33 Ibid., 62.
34 Ibid., 63.
thorough read, it leaves one with the urgency needed to make sure his life is right before God. Hybels also proves that he realizes the gospel message of repentance and faith, “The Bible tells us – and you can bear this out in personal experience – that all along the way we stumble and fall and we commit sins. We violate the standard of holiness that God has asked us to keep.”  

He adds that those who do not understand the magnitude of their sin fail to realize who it is that they are sinning against. He refers to a person’s sins as “cosmic treason,” which Hybels assumes must be easier for the listener to accept than the biblical term of sin. After explaining what he means, that cosmic treason is telling lies, stealing, and committing adultery, he says many people shake a defiant fist in God’s face. Comments like those are actually stronger than much of what one hears today in pulpits across America.

The following is a sampling of what one must take heart with, and hope the best for a pastor with such influence. Bill Hybels says that, “The Bible says the Holy Spirit is calling us, trying to get us to kneel down and repent and receive Jesus Christ. And yet there’s something in us that wants to keep that back stiff, and say, ‘I’m not going to repent; I’m not going to bow. I don’t need this. . .’ And a certain group of people fall to their knees and say, ‘I know I committed cosmic treason, and I know if I stay on that path I’m headed for hell. . .’ Those people are born again. Those people are Christians. It’s a miracle. Those people are rerouted in this life and for all of eternity.”

The “cosmic treason” term used in place of the correct term of sin is very annoying, and reminds one of Osteen’s terms (i.e. flaws, mistakes, and imperfections). Hybels also displays his knack for

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36 Ibid., para 33.
37 Ibid., para 35.
wanting to be the ultimate judge for people’s eternal lives. This modern phenomenon is a
demerit to Arminian theology and its perpetrators who believe they possess the power to
inform sinners of their “salvation.” This single issue has caused an epidemic in America’s
Protestant churches that is referred to as false assurance.

Bill Hybels pleads in the closing of “A Look at Hell,” “Drop to your knees. You
need a Savior. . . Fall to your knees and admit your cosmic treason and ask Jesus Christ to
be your own Savior. . . Trust Him. Try it!” Hybels proves his Arminianism with his “Try
it!” remark. He believes that a man can try Jesus on, like a new jacket, and then decide if
he likes it or not. If not, he can later discard Him, but if he does like Jesus, then he can
remain a Christian. It borders on being a calculated dare strategy. Hybels is so confident
that the person will like Jesus, that he issues a challenge for him to try Him out. Hybels
demonstrates, by this emotion-laden, manipulative evangelistic plea, his reluctance to trust
God’s work in salvation.

The Lord can definitely use this particular sermon of Hybels to effect change in
someone. One must be fair in his criticisms of men who are obviously falling short in their
responsibilities, but who occasionally step up with something God can take advantage of;
though doubt would be cast upon his eternal rewards for his preaching content.

**On the Person of Jesus Christ**

Bill Hybels displays his orthodox Christology in his sermon entitled “Christianity
101,” “He gave His life for me! The sinless, spotless Son of God died in my place. That’s
the central message of the Christian faith: For God so loved the world. Do you understand
that? Let me make sure that you do. Because a holy and just God presides over this entire
universe, all crimes against his holiness – all crimes! – must be paid for. There must be

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38 Ibid., para 41.
punishment.” Again, this is something God can use to draw sinners to Himself. Hybels is by no means a total heretic when it comes to salvation.

However, Hybels does have much in common with Osteen, in that he is definitely an Arminian. In this same message he paraphrases Christ on the cross, “It is finished. I have paid for the crimes against God committed by people all over the world throughout the history of the world - past, present, and future. I have paid for all of them. I have shouldered the sins of the entire world.” This presents his view that the atoning sacrifice of Christ was general; and not the particular nature that the Bible teaches. Arminianism brings into question God’s omniscience and the doctrine of unconditional pre-historic election. Hybels’ constant ravings pleading for people to pray for eternal life also prove his Arminianism.

Bill Hybels’ popularity can best be explained by understanding what type of person is attracted to his teachings. His huge success in terms of sheer numbers is what turns eyes his way. He has gained earthly success by the numerical growth of Willow Creek. Many pastors began emulating Hybel’s methods in the 1980’s, and that phenomenon was the cause of the Willow Creek Association being born. Basically, many pastors are covetous, lazy, and uncommitted in their service to the Lord. Bill Hybels and the Willow Creek Association are unfortunately meeting their needs and feeding their hunger for large congregations and subsequent notoriety.

Bill Hybels is definitely more grounded in Scripture than Osteen; but, by making his physical church structure and his preaching comfortable to the lost and seeking, he has compromised the biblical message. He has failed to rely on the Holy Spirit, and God’s

word, for conversions. Hybels is admired for his appearance, his professionalism, his intelligence, and his sincerity. People in today’s culture, including Christians, desire the aforementioned traits in their leaders, so they join his church en masse. They get entertained, encouraged, and elevated on Saturdays and Sundays at Willow Creek. This attracts lost people, along with indifferent “Christians,” who remain unchallenged and left in their sinful state. These people do not desire to be held accountable for their actions, nor do they care for serving in the ministries of God’s true Church. They want to drive up, get their dose of “Jesus,” and then go about their life. Willow Creek, and churches that emulate, cater to the lost; and therefore become nothing but social organizations designed for nice people.

**Rick Warren Critique**

**Biography**

Rick Warren is the pastor of Saddleback Community Church in California. He is the son of a Southern Baptist pastor and missionary; and, he has earned many degrees (i.e. BA from California Baptist University; MDiv from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; DMin from Fuller Theological Seminary). He has lectured at Oxford, Cambridge, the University of Judaism, and the Evangelical Theological Society. Rick Warren was noted as one of the 25 most influential leaders in America by *US News and World Reports* in October, 2005. He lists his mentors as Billy Graham, Bill Hybels, and Peter Drucker.

Rick Warren single-handedly changed mainline American churches through his mid-1990’s release *The Purpose Driven Church*. It became the standard church growth movement textbook in seminaries and churches around the nation. He later added to his
legacy when he wrote *The Purpose Driven Life*. The book ignited yet another phenomenon, as churches around the country used the book to train their members, and to reach out to the lost. Warren’s soteriology from his latest book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, will be examined, as many of the errors of the church growth movement were already covered in Bill Hybel’s section.

*The Purpose Driven Life*

Warren audaciously informs the reader in the preface that the book will answer the age-old and most asked question in history, “What on earth am I here for?” He boldly states that after the reader has read the book he will understand God’s purpose for his life. He said it will meet your needs, and that, “Having this perspective will reduce your stress, simplify your decisions, increase your satisfaction, and, most important, prepare you for eternity.”\(^{41}\) Rick Warren definitely understands how to sell books in this culture.

Warren quotes Proverbs 11:28 from *The Message* to begin the book. The fact that he quotes from a paraphrased edition of the Bible immediately sends up red warning flags, even though Warren quotes “the Bible” over 1200 times throughout the book. He acknowledges and explains his trickery in the appendix, “Therefore I have deliberately used paraphrases in order to help you see God’s truth in new, fresh ways.”\(^{42}\) Current national religious leaders, like Rick Warren, believe the gospel to be old, stagnant, and worst of all, outdated; helping one to understand the predicament of America’s church. Warren used 15 different translations, and one is left to wonder what the book would sound like if only a single, reliable translation would have been quoted.


\(^{42}\) Ibid., 325.
On Man’s Purpose

Warren confuses the reader already in Day 1 as his first words are, “It’s not about you.” He says that, “The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It’s far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions.”\(^{43}\) That would be just fine if he had not earlier said in the preface that after reading this book your stress would be reduced, your decisions would be simplified, and, you would have increased satisfaction. Warren should have decided before writing the book if it was about you, or not.

There is much good within the pages of this book, and one would be negligent in his failure to acknowledge the fact. Many thousands of unchurched people have been exposed to important Scriptural truths found within this book. It does have a place in culture, and God definitely has used it for his glory, to some degree. The book is very reader-friendly in that it is broken up into devotional sized sections. Rick Warren is much stronger theologically than both Osteen and Hybels, and that jumps out at you in Day 2. For instance: “God is not haphazard; he planned it all with great precision.”\(^{44}\) That would oppose Osteen who teaches that God is reactionary and operates on the fly, so to speak.

Even though Warren claims that the book is not “about you,” he offers five benefits that you will enjoy because of it. First, “Knowing your purpose gives meaning to your life.” He also says that, “Knowing your purpose simplifies your life;” and, “Knowing your purpose focuses your life;” also, “Knowing your purpose motivates your life;” and finally, “Knowing your purpose prepares you for eternity.”\(^{45}\) Worse than Warren contradicting himself early on, is the fact that he tells the reader that, “God won’t ask about your religious

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 17.
\(^{44}\) Ibid., 24.
\(^{45}\) Ibid., 32.
background or doctrinal views. The only thing that matters is, did you accept what Jesus
did for you and did you learn to love and trust him?” This idea strangely comes from a
man with advanced degrees in divinity and ministry. If he really believes that, then what
was his reason for attaining those degrees? He is telling the seeker, or the immature
believer, that doctrine is unimportant and irrelevant in the grand scheme of things. What a
terrible miscalculation on Warren’s part. Second Timothy 2:15 says, “Be diligent to
present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed,
accurately handling the word of truth.” When a new believer hears Warren say such an
empty, unbiblical statement, they will listen and be left unconcerned about doctrine. His
followers will become lazy Christians who fail to rely on the meat of Scripture to guide
their lives.

The biggest problem with The Purpose Driven Life comes early in the book. Day
Seven is entitled The Reason for Everything, and begins with, “It’s all for him.” Warren
backs that statement up with truth by quoting Proverbs 16:4 from the NLT, “The Lord has
made everything for his own purposes.” He then tells the reader that because of God’s
glorious nature people should, “Recognize his glory, honor his glory, declare his glory,
praise his glory, reflect his glory, and live for his glory!” He offers two examples that fail
to glorify God – demons and humans. He says that both fail to glorify God because they
love themselves more than they love God. Roman’s 3:23 (NIV) is used as support, “All
have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” He was in the midst of teaching on
God’s glory, man’s depraved nature, and man’s predicament; therefore, this would have

46 Ibid., 34.
47 Ibid., 53.
48 Ibid., 54.
49 Ibid., 55.
been the ideal place for Warren to teach a sinner about repentance. A solution, such as the true gospel, given exactly in this spot would have been ideal. Rick Warren failed miserably.

Warren may have been judged too early, because there is another section in Day Seven called, “How Can I Bring Glory to God?” He seems to be progressing, as he heads towards the personal application section of the chapter. Warren gives the five purposes for one’s life at the start of this section: (1) We bring God glory by worshiping him; (2) We bring God glory by loving other believers; (3) We bring God glory by becoming like Christ; (4) We bring God glory by serving others with our gifts; and finally, (5) We bring God glory by telling others about him.”  

He does an adequate job of listing five important truths for any true Christian to follow. It can be hoped that he will use this opportunity to lead into how a person can begin this journey.

The next section is entitled “What Will You Live For?” Warren starts out great, once again, as he exhorts the reader to glorify God with his life, “Living the rest of your life for the glory of God will require a change in your priorities, your schedule, your relationships, and everything else.” He later questions the reader, “Will you live for your own goals, comfort, and pleasure, or will you live the rest of your life for God’s glory, knowing that he has promised eternal rewards?”  

Even though eternal rewards are not the best motives for one becoming a Christian, it is a biblical concept, albeit secondary. Warren, to his credit, also stresses the important concept of living life for God’s glory.

Warren is building up to a gospel presentation, and the end of Day Seven finds him breaking into a verbally strong and insistent message. Surely, at this point, he will inform

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50 Ibid., 57.
51 Ibid., 57.
the reader what must be humanly accomplished to enter the family of God. He begins, “It’s time to settle this issue. *Who* are you going to live for – yourself or God?”

Further, Warren teaches, “God will give you what you need if you will just make the choice to live for him.” After telling the reader that, “God is inviting you to live for his glory by fulfilling the purposes he made you for;” he strongly suggests, “Real life begins by committing yourself completely to Jesus Christ.” Warren has reached the climax of this presentation, so it is time for him to explain how a person must do this.

Rick Warren boldly proclaims his salvation message, “If you are not sure you have done this, all you need to do is receive and believe.” Warren’s statement is given at the prime point in his book for the gospel message. In other words, Warren’s most precise gospel presentation offered is that people should, “Receive and believe.” He turns to the Bible, and says that it promises, “To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (Jn 1:12, NIV). The book of John does not include the term repentance, but it is implied throughout. Warren, however, fails to inform the reader that repentance is required for salvation. He then gently pleads, “Will you accept God’s offer?” Warren fails to preach repentance along with faith in Jesus Christ. Rick Warren’s gospel is not “Repent and believe,” but “Receive and believe.” This sounds eerily similar to Joel Osteen’s “Conceive and receive” mantra.

**On Belief**

Warren expounds further, “First, believe. Believe God loves you and made you for his purposes. Believe you’re not an accident. Believe you were made to last forever. Believe God has chosen you to have a relationship with Jesus, who died on the cross for

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52 Ibid., 58.
53 Ibid., 58. Emphasis added.
you. Believe that no matter what you’ve done, God wants to forgive you.” Warren offers a myriad of things to believe in, much like Osteen, but not offering what one really needs to believe in. The Bible unequivocally tells a sinner to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Jn 20:31). Rick Warren should propose a gospel message based on that verse, and clarify the matter so that a sinner can understand, and then cry out for mercy.

Warren then expounds his teaching on how one must “receive” Jesus as their Lord and Savior, “Receive his forgiveness for your sins. Receive his Spirit, who will give you the power to fulfill your life purpose. The Bible says, ‘Whoever accepts and trusts the Son gets in on everything, life complete and forever.’” That quote comes from The Message; but, for the record, John 3:36 actually says, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” Warren’s teaching is scary because he is basically telling the reader to think positively, or “receive” all of the benefits of sonship (i.e. forgiveness, the Spirit, power, fulfilling life’s purpose), without the total life commitment required by God. One must also keep in mind that sinners are biblically commanded to tarry for the Lord, and to beg and pray for mercy on their souls (Lk 18:9-17).

Warren teaches that after thinking positively and believing, one must then say the magic formula. Warren softly pleads, “Wherever you are reading this, I invite you to bow your head and quietly whisper the prayer that will change your eternity: ‘Jesus, I believe in you and I receive you.’ Go ahead.” That plea sounds much like the Arminian dare that Hybels offered. Warren has compromised the gospel message and the Christian life, and now he is pleading with the reader to believe in certain, but not necessarily poignant, truths.

54 Ibid., 58.  
55 Ibid., 58.  
56 Ibid., 58. Emphasis added.
about Jesus Christ. He also tells the reader to receive the benefits Jesus offers to everyone. He does not come right out with instructions on how to receive Jesus, so he apparently implies that one must receive Jesus by believing in the aforementioned truths of Christ, and then whispering the special salvation prayer. Warren then congratulates the reader who prayed with him and welcomes him into the family of God. However, he does that only under the condition that the reader was “sincere” when he prayed. If the sinner was sincere, then Warren believes that he was automatically saved.

**On Assurance of Salvation**

Unfortunately, Warren does not tell the person what sincerity means before God. Only God can save, and only God can let a sinner know his prayer has been heard, and answered in the affirmative. No one else is permitted to go where only God can go. No one other than Jesus Christ can give a person assurance of his salvation. People who do this are doing God a tremendous disservice. Only God knows the day of salvation for any particular sinner (2 Cor 6:2); and only God and His word can offer assurance to a new Christian. John 5:21-22 confirms, “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son.” A witness would well be advised to lead a seeker to John 5:24, which definitely assures a person, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.” Salvific assurance must be left to God and His word.

The false assurance problem lies in the fact that God uses guilt to lead a person to the cross. When a sinner feels the law of God begin to weigh heavy on his heart, he can
turn to God to ease the burden. However, when the weight of the law is removed by a person telling another that his sins have already been forgiven by God, the sinner’s conscience has been left hardened and insensitive. Guilt can no longer be used by God to guide the person to seek forgiveness, because the sinner has mistakenly presumed that his sins are already forgiven and forgotten by Christ. The sinner has thusly been given wrong information leading him to a false belief in his eternal position with God.

Rick Warren chose to eliminate a very important step in the God-ordained salvation process. After the Spirit leads a person to confess their sins through true biblical repentance and faith in the risen Jesus Christ alone for eternal life, then the life of the sinner is imputed to Christ, and the life of Christ is imputed to the new believer. The transaction is sealed by the Holy Spirit, *who cannot be seen performing His work*. To assume to know precisely when the Holy Spirit possesses a person is simply a man attempting to be God. The imputation process is a miraculous switch of biblical and heavenly proportions that no man on this earth can possibly judge.

Warren later offers the reader an opportunity to “believe” in Christ, “The invitation to be part of God’s family is universal, but there is one condition: faith in Jesus.” There is nothing about repentance here, either. Obviously, Warren is afraid that the term “repentance” will not be understood nor accepted by a sinner. Like his mentor Bill Hybels, he refrains from using words with Christian connotations; in other words, he avoids using religious language for fear of scaring seekers. Contrary to that, Christ said, “Repent and believe in the gospel;” (Mark 1:15) and followed that with, “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.” (Mark

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57 Ibid., 118.
This is a very serious warning by Jesus Christ, and must be heeded by religious leaders, including Rick Warren, Bill Hybels, and Joel Osteen.

On Repentance

Rick Warren’s views on repentance are finally uncovered in Day 23, a section on discipleship and sanctification. This teaching is for the saved reader who is seeking to grow in Christ. It has nothing to do with the initial act of salvation. He begins the chapter by chastising those Christians who refuse to “grow up.” After talking about the importance of choosing to make a commitment to God, Warren surprises, “You will need to let go of some old routines, develop some new habits, and intentionally change the way you think.” Warren seems to have grasped the significance of the concept that repentance means to change the way you think. However, Nathan Busenitz explains a serious problem, “The fact that Warren waits to explain repentance until later in the book almost hints at a pietistic (or, ‘deeper life’) perspective – where repentance and ‘surrendering to God’ is wrongly viewed as separate, post-conversion experiences.”

Rick Warren evidently understands the definition of the term repentance, which is a call to change the way you view almost everything, to the point that it leads to a changed lifestyle. However, he declines to tell the seeker, even though Jesus told seekers, John the Baptist told seekers, and Peter told seekers. Rick Warren obviously believes he has a better plan for seekers. The conclusion can be drawn that Rick Warren does not believe that repentance is a necessary aspect of salvation.

Rick Warren tells the new Christian, “Your first step in spiritual growth is to start changing the way you think. Change always first starts in your mind. The way you think
determines the way you feel, and the way you feel influences the way you act.\textsuperscript{61} Warren is finally onto something, “To be like Christ you must develop the mind of Christ. The New Testament calls this mental shift \textit{repentance}, which in Greek literally means “to change your mind.” He explains repentance in fine fashion, “You repent whenever you change the way you think by adopting how God thinks – about yourself, sin, God, other people, life, your future, and everything else. You take Christ’s outlook and perspective.”\textsuperscript{62} That is actually an effective definition of repentance, \textit{albeit} in a questionable place in his book. He then breaks the mind change down to two main shifts: 1) “The first half of this mental shift is to stop thinking \textit{immature} thoughts, which are self-centered and self-seeking.” 2) “The second half of thinking like Jesus is to \textit{start} thinking \textit{maturely}, which focuses on others, not yourself.”\textsuperscript{63} This latter teaching proves that Warren sees repentance only in the sanctification process, because he leaves sin out of the picture altogether. He focuses more on acting mature, and thinking more of others. Those two points are actually some of the fruits that come by truly repenting of your incorrect natural worldview.

Rick Warren has a false gospel message to offer the lost. The problem is due to bad theology. He has such a sense of love for the sinner that he wants to do everything in \textit{his power} to lead the sinner to Jesus Christ. Rick Warren’s means to this end, such as altering the pure gospel message, have usurped his biblically mandated responsibilities as a witness for God. One’s motives and methods for winning souls must be grounded in Scripture, not in the love of man.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[61] Warren, 182.
\item[62] Ibid., 182.
\item[63] Ibid., 182.
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Conclusions Drawn from the Critique of Today’s Evangelical Leaders

First of all, one’s theological education, or lack of it, obviously does not matter in his orthodoxy. Joel Osteen, Bill Hybels, and Rick Warren are all weak in theology, despite the fact that they have different levels of biblical training. They are each shrewd businessmen who happen to be leading a so-called church. Their weekly sermons are not much more than pep rallies meant to encourage the consumers of the services and programs the church offers. They rarely refer to the Bible; therefore, the Bible and the pastor lack authority to properly shepherd people’s lives. Their unbiblical gospel message has eliminated the need of true repentance, and it only calls on simple faith to be placed in Jesus. Repentance, to these men, seems to be nothing but an afterthought that can be addressed later in the Christian’s life, if at all.

Benefitism (Felt Needs) Gospel

There are earthly biblical benefits to be gained by a soul who becomes forgiven by God. Those benefits are listed in the Westminster Confession of Faith. The answer to Question 36 in the Shorter Catechism says, “The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption and sanctification, are, assurance of God’s love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.” The trio preaches unbiblical benefitism without shame. The enticing message of life-enhancements is meant to allure people into their pews. The sermons are simply inspired antidotes for today’s ills. The lightweight preaching aims to uplift tired and weary souls from the drag of busy 21st century American life. The sermons are usually twenty to thirty minutes in length, and full of humor and antidotes for life’s problems. Entertainment

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64 Westminster Confession of Faith, 297.
is expected by their congregants; so, the music, the dramas, and the messages aim to please their five senses.

**Compromisers of the True Gospel**

The preachers love their vocational position, and they avoid saying and doing anything that would harm their security. They are somehow famous in American culture at a time when the culture is hostile to Christianity. This is an interesting fact, and it leads one to question exactly what they are saying to the public. This study exposes their message as a pleasing word for the worldly. These preachers would undoubtedly be much less popular if they taught biblical repentance in the gospel message.

**Church Growth Movement**

Assimilation is huge with this group of men and their churches. They love to watch churches grow into huge assemblies. They stand by Acts 2 which showed Peter counting the 3000 new believers in a single day, even though counting happens nowhere else in the N.T. church. Holding their members accountable to holy living in such large churches would seem an enormous task, but there is no mention in their teachings about such matters.

**Weak Soteriology**

By all indications, the trio is either Arminian or Semi-Pelagian in their soteriology. They fail to teach the totally depraved and spiritually hapless nature of the natural man. They believe that God conditionally “chose” people based on His eternal preview of their earthly commitment to Him. They believe, with all of their hearts, that Jesus died for the sins of every person that has ever existed. They affirm that one cannot lose his salvation, quite possibly with the exception of Joel Osteen on any given day; but their soteriologies
are inconsistent and would not allow for this if followed through to their logical end. These
men brandish Arminianism and Semi-Pelagianism, which are the majority beliefs of 21\textsuperscript{st}
century American Protestant leaders.

**Offer False Assurance**

The three men also instill a false assurance, leading to many spurious conversions. They tell the person who prayed the sinner’s prayer that, if they were sincere with their prayer, God has saved them. They are undermining the work of the Spirit in the person’s life by way of hardening their conscience. They positively judge men, which is much more dangerous than negatively judging a soul. Both positive and negative judging may only be done by God alone; and if He desires to give a saved individual assurance through His word and experience, so be it. They may all be compassionate men who want the best for those they love. They may deeply love those times when a person makes a profession of faith followed with baptism. However, in their desire to make a person feel better about their life’s circumstances, that is, more comfortable and at peace with themselves; they have forsaken the gospel message.

**The Lost Doctrine of Repentance**

Repentance unto life is a forgotten doctrine by these men, and many more like them. They are anxious to win men through a simple faith that requires little to no commitment. Consequently, the false gospel found in current evangelical churches only wins nice sinners into their churches. The deceptive cycle of bad evangelism then continues through those won to their churches, as their false gospel spreads outward.

These are six very severe allegations against some of the most popular pastors of 21\textsuperscript{st} century America. When one adds these allegations together, and sets aside all well-
wishing emotional platitudes, they form an accusation that these three men, and their disciples around the world, are preaching a new human gospel. Their collective characters and integrity are not an issue, but their theology is founded in the rebellious will of man. Their new gospel is pleasantly wrapped in biblical language, and has, on the surface, pure motivations; plus, it sounds so good to the human ear and heart. However, their message is deceitful and dangerous to the undiscerning biblically illiterate listener and seeker.

They draw people into their auditoriums and then entertain them with wholesome and pleasant music, drama, and sermons. They befriend them, make them feel welcome, and encourage them. They offer many beneficial programs for the family, the single person, and the distressed soul. They improve the life of many people through counseling. They work so hard to help make the world a better place for their followers to live. The elect are only passing through this temporary world, however, and nothing remotely similar to comfort, casual living, and an excitingly entertaining culture are something a Christian should desire, much less actively seek and immerse himself in. The convert’s life should be spent developing a new Christian worldview. He should be in prayer, study, and active fruit-bearing service to His new King. The pastor’s efforts should be guided towards those ends and not towards the massive proliferation of unsaved souls into a church building. The religious leaders this study has focused on have many errors, and the most glaring is their neglect of salvific repentance. The study will now permit Charles H. Spurgeon to speak to these issues.
CHAPTER SIX

AN ANALYSIS OF THE DOCTRINE OF REPENTANCE IN THE GOSPEL PREACHED BY CHARLES H. SPURGEON

Biography

Charles H. Spurgeon is considered by many as the finest Baptist theologian/pastor in its nearly 400 years of existence. His sheer volume of work gives testimony to the extent of his thorough gospel knowledge. He was a man raised up in the word and trained in the doctrines of grace. His father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all strict Calvinists who had a tremendous influence upon young Charles. He did not attend college, because of what he described as divine providence; however, by ten years of age he was reading such Puritan authors as John Bunyan, John Owen, Richard Sibbes, John Flavel and Matthew Henry.1 His love for reading culminated in a personal library that included 12,000 books, of which 7,000 were authored by those of Puritan persuasion.

Charles H. Spurgeon held positions at several churches in his home of England. He began at Waterbeach Baptist Chapel in Cambridge as a young teenager. He accepted a position in 1854 at New Park Street Chapel in London at the age of 19. The church thrived from his preaching, and once again the pews had become filled with church goers. Several productive years passed before he moved on to pastor at Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1861.2 His time there was fruitful and eventful because he never strayed from the Gospel. His

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Arminian detractors eventually outnumbered him and left him broken of spirit by the late 1880’s. He preached at Metropolitan until June of 1991 and passed away in January of 1992.

Certain theologians today dissect his theology attempting to make him something less than the strict Calvinist that he so joyfully claimed to be. This particular undertaking will study several of his writings on conversion and seek to learn how Spurgeon’s teaching can help modern evangelicals recover the true gospel message of salvation through repentance and faith. His thoughts on the nature and elements of repentance, faith, and salvation will especially be concentrated upon.

**Spurgeon On Truth**

The earlier look at today’s culture revealed that absolute truth has been misconstrued by the modernists, who believe it to be solely knowable through reason. Absolute truth has also been totally abandoned by the postmodernists, who claim that absolute truth is a myth. God’s truth has been rejected because the mainstream thinkers of both the modern and postmodern worldviews deny it. They have had a tremendously negative effect upon both culture and Christianity. This is similar to what Charles H. Spurgeon was up against in 19th century England, as well. It did not simply infect the unbelievers of his time, but also those who called themselves Christians. Spurgeon shared this thought in his book *Grace: God’s Unmerited Favor*, “The great mass of professing Christians know nothing of doctrine. Their religion consists in going a certain number of times to a place of worship, *but that have no care for truth one way or another.*”3 The loss of the love of truth has undermined Christianity from the time of Spurgeon until today.

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Charles H. Spurgeon spoke on the relation of truth to the great doctrines of grace, “However, this is like a granite step upon the eternal pyramid of truth. Get your feet on this, and there is no fear of slipping so far as doctrinal standing is concerned. If we would have our churches well instructed and holding fast to the truth, we must bring out the grand old gospel doctrine of eternal purpose of God in Christ Jesus before the world began.”

This helps to understand the focus that Spurgeon placed upon both truth and the reformed doctrines of grace, which is exactly where today’s culture is left wanting.

**On Soul Winning**

Spurgeon, at the beginning of his book *The Soul Winner*, asked, “What is the real winning of a soul for God?” He wasted no time in pointing out that, “One of its main operations consists in instructing a man that he may know the truth of God.” He understood that the minister’s service was to change the mind of a man, so that the man could, in turning, then follow Christ. Do not be mistaken, Spurgeon thoroughly understood and fully accepted the doctrines of grace in their entirety. He held to the belief that salvation is strictly borne in the throne room of God, and carried out entirely by His grace. Regarding this, he said, “He who is chosen of God chooses God; he chooses God because he has been chosen.” Spurgeon actually took it one step further, “The man who believes that God has chosen him is the man who enters into covenant with God and keeps that covenant. . . The vows of God are upon him. Such amazing grace compels him to a

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4 Ibid., 59.
6 *Grace*, 126.
consecrated life.”\textsuperscript{7} Spurgeon’s position proves the utmost importance he placed on the doctrines of grace.

Spurgeon rested on the providence of God for salvation. He fully trusted in God’s work to bring a sinner to Himself through His Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. God protects a sinner who has been chosen. He protects him from a worldview that would totally eliminate God and His word (\textit{i.e.} the truth). He does not allow the elect to fully believe a bogus worldview that once and for all disbelieves God and His word. The chosen, but yet unsaved soul, is protected by God from blaspheming the Holy Spirit, which seals the permanent condemnation of a sinner. (see Mat 12:31)

Spurgeon believed that it is a Christian’s privilege to witness to and educate a lost man about the gospel. He also realized that a Christian has limits, “You may educate an unregenerate man to the highest degree. Yet, he remains, and must forever remain, dead in sin unless a higher power comes in to save him from himself.”\textsuperscript{8} However, that does not mean we are not to try. A Christian’s calling consists of lovingly and patiently educating sinners whenever possible.

Spurgeon rhetorically asked, “Does not the Holy Spirit influence our will, turning us from the obstinacy of our former rebellion to the obedience of the truth? Does not the Holy Spirit renew us, creating us ‘in Christ Jesus unto good works’ (Ephesians 2:10)? Is it not by the Holy Spirit’s breath that we live the spiritual life? Is He not to us Instructor, Comforter, and Quickener; \textit{is He not everything, in fact, through His active operations upon our minds}?\textsuperscript{9} Spurgeon knew full well that God was the one who effects change in the sinner’s mind. God uses the minister, as well as many other people and things, to change a

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 126.
\textsuperscript{8} Grace, 107.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 39. Emphasis added.
sinner’s mind; but it is only by His word through His power that a totally depraved sinner can turn from his way. Spurgeon taught that, “To influence persons of thought, we must do so by solid reasoning. Shallow minds may be impressed by mere warmth of emotion and force of excitement, but the more intellectual part of the community must be dealt with in quite another manner.”

That is exactly what his sermons demonstrated - the drive to intelligently bring God’s called men and women to a better understanding of the gospel. He rightfully left the rest up to God.

**On Faith and Repentance**

Spurgeon shared his view, while teaching on one form of false repentance, about a man’s response to the work of God’s grace. He fully believed that salvation was through faith and repentance:

> In fact, this is how true Christians live; they repent as bitterly as for sin as if they knew they should be damned for it; but they rejoice as much in Christ as if sin were nothing at all. Oh, how blessed it is to know where these two lines meet, the stripping of repentance, and the clothing of faith! The repentance that ejects sin as an evil tenant, and the faith which admits Christ to be the sole master of the heart; the repentance which purges the soul from dead works, and the faith that fills the soul with living works; the repentance which pulls down, and the faith which builds up; the repentance that scatters stones, and the faith which puts stones together; the repentance which ordains a time to weep, and the faith that gives a time to dance – these two things together make up the work of grace within, whereby men’s souls are saved. Be it, then laid down as a great truth, most plainly written in our text, that the repentance we ought to preach is one connected with faith, and thus we may preach repentance and faith together without any difficulty whatever.

Spurgeon believed that for a man to be finally and eternally saved he had to both repent and believe in Jesus Christ as his Savior. Much like Martin Luther, he taught that faith without repentance is not faith at all, and repentance without faith is not true repentance. Faith and

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10 Ibid., 31.
repentance are the two sides of a single coin, and if a man did not express both in unison, his “conversion” was spurious.

Spurgeon would have agreed with today’s mainline Protestant definition of faith, which is: Fully trusting in Christ alone for salvation. However, he would not have agreed with today’s teaching on faith, because repentance is neglected. Faith, for Spurgeon, was synonymous with repentance towards God, and belief in Jesus Christ. The simple faith taught today, however, leaves a sinner without repentance. Spurgeon despised this type of faith, and warned against it, “I know some very excellent brethren – would God there were more like them in zeal and love – who, in their zeal to preach up simple faith in Christ have felt a little difficulty about the matter of repentance; and I have known some of them who have tried to get over the difficulty by softening down the apparent hardness of the word repentance.”

The neglect of repentance is not only a problem in today’s culture, but it was very much wreaking havoc in 19th century England, as well.

Spurgeon’s teaching can speak to people today, as demonstrated in “The Need and Nature of Conversion,” “But the faith which believes in Jesus is a living and active faith, which works in the soul a hatred of sin; and if a man says, ‘I believe in Christ,’ and yet continues to delight in sin, he is a liar, and the truth is not in him, for ‘faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.’ That faith alone will save us which is proved to be a vital and real faith by bringing forth ‘fruits meet for repentance.’” Spurgeon considered a worldly Christian an unbeliever. He had this to say regarding the dual command of faith and repentance:

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12 Ibid., 399.
It may be that in preaching simple trust in Christ as being the way of salvation, that they omit to remind the sinner that no faith can be genuine but such as is perfectly consistent with repentance for past sin; for my text seems to me to put it thus: no repentance is true but that which consorts with faith; no faith is true but that which is linked with a hearty and sincere repentance on account of past sin. So then, dear friends, those people who have a faith which allows them to think lightly of past sin, have the faith of devils, and not the faith of God’s elect.\(^\text{14}\)

Therefore, in Spurgeon’s discerning mind, this was the gospel message: True faith plus true repentance equals true conversion. One or the other being non-existent in a person’s life means the person remains separated from God.

Spurgeon counted repentance as a biblical necessity for salvation; plus, he saw it as reasonable. Spurgeon expounded the need of repentance, and then asked, “How would it be consistent with the holiness of God for him to put aside our past sin, and then to allow us to go on sinning as we did before?” Spurgeon advanced his thought, “Nowhere, in the whole compass of revelation, is there a promise of forgiveness to the man who continues in his iniquity. There is a promise of pardon to the sinner who forsakes his way, and turns from his evil thoughts; there are many promises of forgiveness to those who confess their sins in humble penitence, and who seek to live new lives under the power of the Holy Spirit.”\(^\text{15}\)

Spurgeon’s thought did not allow for a man to claim salvation, and then continue to live like the world. He had a hard time understanding how anyone could even remotely consider the thought that a sinner could continue to live in sin. He asked the listener, “Think, for a moment, what any other result would involve; if it were possible for a man to live in sin, and yet be forgiven, what would be the value of the work of the Holy Ghost?”\(^\text{16}\)

Theologically, and logically, Spurgeon saw the need of repentance in a sinner’s life. He also made the point that the name of Jesus Christ is at stake, “The angel said to Joseph,\(^\text{14}\) Faith and Repentance Inseparable, 403.
\(^\text{15}\) The Need and Nature of Repentance, 446.
\(^\text{16}\) Ibid., 448.
before our Saviour’s birth, ‘Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins;’ but if they can be saved in their sins, where is the meaning of his name?” Repentance played a very large part in Spurgeon’s soteriology; hence, with that point established, this work will progress to more of Spurgeon’s detailed teaching on repentance.

**On the Definition of Repentance**

Spurgeon relished A.A. Hodge’s *Outlines of Theology*. He used it as the main theological textbook for students in his college. Iain Murray wrote, “The theology which the Hodge family taught at Princeton for a century was the same as the system which Spurgeon sought to have implanted in the minds of his students at his Pastor’s College.”

Consequently, this study will borrow Hodge’s definition of repentance from his systematic work: “It is a voluntary forsaking of sin as evil and hateful, with sincere sorrow, humiliation, and confession; and a returning unto God, because he has a right to us, and because he is merciful and willing to forgive, together with a determination to live, by the help of his grace, in obedience to his commandments.”

Spurgeon, several times in his preaching, offered his own definition for repentance, for instance, “Wherever there is real sorrow for sin, wherever there is an honest determination, by God’s grace, to cease from sin, wherever there is a complete change of mind with regard to sin, - for that is what repentance means.”

He immediately added, “The Holy Ghost never preaches repentance as a trifle; and the change of mind or understanding of which the gospel speaks is a very deep and solemn work, and must not on any account be depreciated. . . There must be sorrow for sin and hatred of it in true repentance, or else I have read my Bible to little

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His definition enlarged in “Faith and Repentance Inseparable,” “To repent does mean a change of mind; but then it is a thorough change of the understanding and all that is in the mind, so that it includes an illumination, an illumination of the Holy Spirit; and I think it includes a discovery of iniquity and a hatred of it, without which there can hardly be a genuine repentance.”  These century-old words of Charles H. Spurgeon lambaste today’s evangelical preachers, because they shrug their shoulders at biblical repentance. They treat repentance as a simple acknowledgement of wrong doing in one’s life.

Spurgeon, in his exposition of Isaiah 55:7, said, “But the prophet also insists most clearly that the wicked man must forsake his way, and the unrighteous man must turn from his thoughts, and return to the Lord.” Sixteen years earlier, which proves that preaching repentance never grew old to him, Spurgeon had this to say, “And again, that change of mind, that after-carefulness which leads me to resolve that in [the] future I will live like Jesus, and will not live unto the lusts of the flesh . . . – that is the repentance which will save me, and the repentance he asks of me.” This type of repentance never becomes outdated, and it must be taught today regardless of the consequences.

True repentance requires a complete change of mind in one’s worldview. A person’s worldview consists of beliefs of God, creation, sin, the nature of man, and his morality. Spurgeon offered what he believed are the things that must change in a sinner’s mind if he is to become a true Christian. First, he is to give up “His opinion of God. . . It is possible that he has thought nothing of him; or if he has thought of him at all, he has dared even judge his Creator, and to find fault with what God does.” Secondly, “You will have to give up your opinion concerning God’s law. You thought it was too severe, too stringent,
and that you could improve it a great deal.” Thirdly, Spurgeon added, “You will have to feel that sin is exceedingly sinful, a great and deadly evil, or you will never be likely to seek and to find peace with God.” Fourthly, “You will also have to change your mind about the Lord Jesus Christ. He is nothing to you now; but he will have to be everything to you if you are to be saved by him.” Spurgeon concluded, “You will have to change your mind about yourself; you fancy that you are a fine fellow now, but you will have to regard yourself as less than nothing before you come to your right position before God. If ever you are to find mercy at his hands, you will have to forsake your present thoughts on all these matters.”

One paragraph hardly does justice to Spurgeon’s thought on this matter. However, a person would do well by covering himself in sackcloth and ashes if he is interested in the type of commitment to biblical repentance that was taught by Charles H. Spurgeon. A complete washing of one’s erroneous natural worldview, and the acceptance of a biblical worldview will not happen overnight. Thorough biblical repentance is a gradual process whereby God works his truth into your mind through preaching, teaching, and Bible reading; and, as He does that work, the old and wrong thoughts on these matters are slowly removed.

**On the *Ordo Salutis***

Spurgeon’s works on conversion reveal his utter dependence upon Scripture. He also employs Calvinism consistently throughout his theology because he admired the pastoral work of Calvin as much as his theology. Lewis Drummond explains, “But in this sense, he ministered much in the tradition of Calvin himself. Calvin preached the Bible as he found it. For Spurgeon authority rested in *sola scriptura*, although from time to time he would attempt to corroborate his position by tradition, experience, reason, even the creeds.

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Still, primarily, as an absolute believer in the infallible Word of God, he built his theology on the Bible as he understood it.\textsuperscript{24} Spurgeon, unlike many pastors today, weighed all doctrinal matters by the Scriptures, and he sought counsel by searching the great minds of Christendom.

Spurgeon became a strong adherent of the doctrine of total depravity through his studies. He believed without a doubt that a natural man is without goodness and without a desire to seek God; and, in fact, is totally unable to seek God through his own power (Romans 3:10-12). God must work in the sinner to open his ears and eyes to the Gospel. This process is called regeneration, and it implants a new nature in the man.

Spurgeon’s love for the \textit{Westminster Confession of Faith} was well-known; therefore, the study will turn to this document for a detailed Reformed definition of regeneration:

All those whom God hath predestined unto life, and those only, He is pleased in His appointed and accepted time effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by His almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.\textsuperscript{25}

All Calvinists agree that regeneration occurs at some point before any spiritual goodness comes from a man. Regeneration is the next exercise in salvation after election. A.A. Hodge furthered the argument, “Faith designates the primary act of the new nature, and also that permanent state or habit of mind which continues the essential condition of all other graces. It is the spiritual apprehension of the truth by the mind, and the loyal embrace of truth by the will, without which there can be neither love, hope, peace, joy, nor

\textsuperscript{24} Lewis Drummond, \textit{Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers} (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 659.

Hodge then concluded his thought, “Repentance is more specific, and expresses that hatred and renunciation of sin, and that turning unto God, which accompanies faith as its consequence.” Spurgeon was not quite as dogmatic about the chronological sequence of faith and repentance, as seen here, “The repentance which is here commanded is the result of faith; it is born at the same time with faith – they are twins, and to say which is the elder-born passes my knowledge. It is a great mystery; faith is before repentance in some of its acts, and repentance before faith in another view of it; the fact being that they come into the soul together.” The most important truth is that both of these events (i.e. faith and repentance) must take place in a person’s life before he becomes saved. A sinner will fall short of forgiveness, and therefore fall short of sharing in God’s everlasting glory, without regeneration, faith, or repentance.

**On False Repentance**

The devil is surely interested in such an important matter as repentance. He is active in fooling humans into a false experience of repentance. Spurgeon discussed the possibility of such a gross error in length, “I will begin with this remark – that trembling beneath the sound of the gospel is not ‘repentance.’” He also warned, “Well, my hearers, you may be very much disturbed under the preaching of the gospel, and yet you shall not have that ‘repentance unto life.’” He used Felix under Paul’s witness to prove that fear of the consequences of sin is not enough to constitute true repentance.

Spurgeon said that one could also resemble Agrippa, and be “almost persuaded” to turn to Jesus Christ, and yet have no repentance. He warned those who only enjoyed the

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26 Hodge, 489.  
27 Faith and Repentance Inseparable, 402.  
fact that there is a gospel message. Such a person’s spirit loves to hear the gospel, and know that there is a hope for eternal life. He attends church, and refers to himself as a Christian. Conviction may come upon this person, and he may even drop to his knees and pray. However, he does not possess true repentance. Spurgeon called a person such as this a hypocrite.29

Spurgeon also shared what he felt was an advanced form of repentance, but not salvific repentance. He talked of Ahab and how he coveted Naboth’s vineyard. Jezebel desired the vineyard for Ahab, so she seized the vineyard after first killing Naboth. Later, Ahab repented of the activity by humbling himself. God granted him momentary mercy, but Ahab later rebelled against the Lord, and the Lord took his life. Spurgeon became graphic at this point:

You too, I tell you, may humble yourselves before God for a time, and yet remain the slaves of your transgressions. You are afraid of damnation, but you are not afraid of sinning; you are afraid of hell, but you are not afraid of your iniquities; you are afraid of being cast into the pit, but not afraid to harden your hearts against his commands. Is it not true, O sinner, that you are trembling at hell? It is not the soul’s state that troubles you, but hell. If hell were extinguished, your repentance would be extinguished; if the terrors awaiting you were withdrawn you would sin with a higher hand than before, and your soul would be hardened, and would rebel against its sovereign.30

Spurgeon made the point that a sinner may acknowledge God by affirming Him as the sovereign ruler and ultimate judge of the universe. However, in his love for himself and his sin, he fails to truly repent of his evil thoughts and actions. He comes short, because God requires the sinner to thoroughly repent of his natural thoughts. This condition is caused by a sinner only repenting of his thoughts of God and creation, while neglecting to change his mind about sin and himself.

29 Repentance Unto Life, 333.
30 Ibid., 333.
Spurgeon also warned of yet another semblance of repentance, “It is possible that you may confess your sins, and yet may not repent.” He furthered the thought, “You may approach God, and tell him you are a wretch indeed; you may enumerate a long list of your transgressions and of the sins that you have committed, without a sense of the heinousness of your guilt, without a spark of real hatred of your deeds. You may confess and acknowledge your transgressions, and yet have no abhorrence of sin.”

Spurgeon also offered a word to the Catholic system of penance, “You may do some work meet for repentance, and yet you may be impenitent.” This situation arises when a sinner understands his position before God, but fails to grasp the magnitude of his sin. He used Judas as an example, because Judas understood that his betrayal of Jesus was wrong. He discarded the ill-gotten silver because of his remorse, but his soul was left to the devil. Spurgeon said that a sinner can look so close to a Christian that even wisdom, if it were mortal, would be deceived.

Spurgeon’s latter point was that no man can discern true repentance in another, especially in a new convert’s spiritual life. Therefore, in Spurgeon’s mind, no one had the right to tell someone else that they had truly repented and been saved, because of a prayer or any other action.

The only repentance worse than false repentance would be no repentance at all; and that is exactly what has happened in today’s church. Laypeople lack the knowledge to define the term, because preachers fail to teach repentance; therefore, they lack the ability to correctly repent. There will be no excuses on judgment day by the preachers, and no excuses by any other; everyone is culpable, because the times of ignorance have ceased.

**On True Repentance**

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31 Ibid., 334.
32 Ibid., 334.
Charles H. Spurgeon’s writings were additionally searched for what he classified as true repentance. Spurgeon, in “Repentance unto Life,” based on Acts 11:18, first defined repentance as, “A hatred of sin; it is a turning from sin and a determination in the strength of God to forsake it. Repentance is a hatred of sin, and a forsaking it.” He said it is possible for a man to repent without a terrific display of terror of the Law. He expressed the thought that, “Some hearts God opens to faith, as in the case of Lydia [Acts 16:14-15]. Others he assaults with the sledge hammer of the wrath to come; some he opens with the picklock of grace, and some with the crowbar of the law.” Spurgeon conveyed the thought that repentance can be wrought by God in many different forms and fashions. He likened it to faith by saying that there are varying degrees of faith, but yet the least faith saves; so there are many degrees of repentance, and the least repentance will save, if it is real. A penitent young Christian at the time of salvation may not realize the term repentance applies to his actions, but as he continues to faithfully grow in Christ he will come to understand.

Spurgeon explained the signs that prove a man’s true repentance: First, “There is always sorrow with it.” He said no man is saved who fails to produce sorrow for his own sin, because his sins put Jesus to death. He added that, “Ye who have tearless eyes, unbended knees, unbroken hearts, how can ye think ye are saved?” Spurgeon later clarified by saying that one does not necessarily have to cry physical tears, but that the heart must be broken for true repentance. Spurgeon struggled to detail a converted man’s thoughts after God has opened his soul to the extreme horrors of his own sin. True repentant sorrow is a hard concept to convey to an audience, but a preacher has the responsibility to attempt the

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33 Ibid., 334.  
34 Ibid., 335.  
35 Ibid., 335.
feat. The gravity of his sins weigh so heavily upon his soul that it crushes his heart, pushes tears from his eyes, and drops him to his knees. Biblical repentance also drives a man to verbally confess his sins, and the fact that he is, by nature, a sinner. (Lk 5:8) A “Christian” who lacks this action must be questioned regarding his knowledge of the subject, and quite possibly his salvation.

Spurgeon believed that practice is involved in true repentance, “We know a tree by its fruit, and you who are penitent will bring forth works of repentance.”36 He said that those who are sorry for their sins, but later go on and perform the evil again and again, are mistaken, “True repentance will yield works meet for repentance – it will be practical repentance.” A new Christian must have a new life. His words change, his interests change, and his overall life changes. He is now the slave of Jesus Christ, and he must serve his new Master. Spurgeon also said that the practical nature of one’s repentance must endure. He likened the “convert” who returns to his sin as the dog who returns to lap up its vomit. He believed that anyone who falls away was not truly a Christian to begin with. Spurgeon viewed true repentance as a continual, lasting action that follows a man from salvation to grave.

Spurgeon’s last point in this sermon regarding true repentance was that one must detest sin because of its nature, and because it offends God. Sin offends God, and since He is his Lord, a Christian must hate what offends Him. Spurgeon pointed out the highest motive one can have for hating sin, and desiring to repent of it:

Do you think you’ll repent of your sins if no punishment were placed before you? Do you repent because you know you shall be punished forever if you remain in your sins? Suppose I tell you there is no hell at all; that, if you choose, you may swear; and, if you will, you may live without God. . . Can you honestly say, this morning, “I think, I know, by the grace of God, I would choose righteousness if there were no

36 Ibid., 336.
reward for it, if there were nothing to be gained by righteousness, and nothing to be lost by sin.  

He added that a child hates his sin when the paddle is ready to strike his bottom, and so every sinner hates his sin when he gets near to the gaping mouth of hell. Spurgeon, at this point, charged the Christian to a life of holiness, for God’s sake, and not for selfish reasons. One who understands this concept, and has adopted it as his doctrine of repentance, can be confident of his repentance, and confident of his salvation.

Spurgeon, in “The Need and Nature of Repentance,” once again remarked on true repentance:

When the Lord Jesus Christ saves a sinner from the punishment of sin, he also saves him from the love of sin; he makes him holy as well as makes him happy and safe. . . He who would be married to Christ must first be divorced from sin. There is no possibility of walking in the way of the Lord and, at the same time, treading the pathway of evil. No man can serve two masters. No one can, at the same time, be a servant of the Saviour and a servant of Satan.

He is not saying that a man must become sinless. He said that it is an attitude in the Christian; an attitude which despises sin and wants to defeat sin, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Spurgeon believed it is an ongoing battle between the flesh and spirit whereby the Christian sins, and then repents. He sins, and then repents. Finally, he commits that sin no more. This is victory in Jesus Christ for the true penitent who has God’s hand squeezing the hellish sin out of him.

The apostle Paul knew that true repentance has the power of God behind it; therefore, he could pen Scripture, such as Galatians 5:19-21, with full confidence. The passage states, “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes,  

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37 Ibid., 337.
38 The Need and Nature of Repentance, 447.
dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Biblical repentance makes it possible for a person who is involved in such activities to turn away from them without regret. Christians can struggle with these sins, of course, and in certain circumstances fail to conquer some in their earthly lifetimes. Scripture teaches that a true believer in Jesus Christ will stop the progression of sins he is involved in. His attitude is new and his spirit has been renewed. The believer in Jesus Christ has given his life to God, and now relies on God’s desires made known to him through Scripture and the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit directs, the murderer will stop killing, the adulterer will stop his sin, the thief will stop stealing, and the homosexual will cease his immorality, etc. The Holy Spirit leads the child of God away from the sins that held him captive. True repentance, manifested in a saved soul, brings an incredible amount of glory to God.

On the Sinner

Spurgeon believed that humans are totally unable on their own, without God’s power, to merit anything remotely approaching salvation. He said that God commands men to repent and believe the gospel; however, “It is one of the saddest proofs of man’s utter depravity that he will not obey this command, but that he will despise Christ, and so make his doom worse than the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah.”39 The fabric of man’s nature is woven with rebelliousness; and without the Holy Spirit’s work, not one soul would be saved.

39 Faith and Repentance Inseparable, 399.
Spurgeon pleaded for sinners to repent in his closing remarks of “Repentance and Remission,” “May the ever-blessed Spirit come to you, and take away your pride and your self-righteousness, and bring you down where you must come, just as publicans and harlots must come, to the pierced feet of him who loves sinners, and receives sinners, and saves sinners, and who will receive you and save you if you will but trust him!”

This plea highlighted the two main problems of sinners: pride and self-righteousness. Pride makes a sinner defend himself from God’s accusations (i.e. the Law); and, self-righteousness inflates the sinner as he compares himself to the dregs of society. Pride “protects” the sinner from conviction and guilt that comes through God’s correction; and, self-righteousness “protects” the sinner from the fear of the consequences of sin. The sinner, in both cases, has deceived himself. He denies God, God’s holiness, his own nature, and his responsibility to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. He wrongly believes that his denial of these facts makes it reality; and therefore, he will not have to face God on judgment day.

The nature of all sinners consists of this type of rebellious mental activity; and only the Holy Spirit and true repentance can defeat this mortal enemy.

**On the Holy Spirit**

Man is doomed to the pit without the Holy Spirit; and Spurgeon believed that it is God who takes the initiative in salvation, “Not only does God bid men turn to Him, but He enables them to turn to Him; so the gospel of this passage is, that God the Holy Ghost is freely given to sinners to turn them, first in their hearts, and then in their lives. What you cannot do of yourself, the Holy Spirit will enable you to do, or will do for you.” Romans 2:4 rhetorically asks, “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance.

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40 Repentance and Remission, 563.
41 The Need and Nature of Repentance, 453.
and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” Only a gracious and kind God would ever do something as wonderful as saving a sinner from the power of sin and death. The salvation process cost the Father his Son for a time, but it gained Him a human family for an eternity. Spurgeon described the process thusly:

It is the marvel of divine mercy that it not only provides the way of salvation, that it not only invites men to receive grace, but that it positively makes men willing to be saved. God punished his Son Jesus Christ for our sins, and therein he provided salvation for all his lost children. He sends his minister; the minister bids men repent and believe, and he labors to bring them to God. They will not listen to the call, and they despise the minister. But then another messenger is sent, a heavenly ambassador who cannot fail. He summons men to repent and turn to God. Their thoughts are a little wayward, but after He, the Divine Spirit, pleads with them, they forget what manner of men they were, and they repent and turn.  

Spurgeon believed that God uses both the Christian witness and the Holy Spirit in a man’s salvation. The Christian witness issues a general call that goes out to all of mankind by way of His word. The witness disseminates biblical information to sinners, thereby aiding God through the teaching of the gospel. The Holy Spirit builds upon the work of the Christian witness by enlightening the mind of the sinner. The Spirit enables a sinner to recall important required information (i.e. knowledge of God’s holiness, the sacrifice of Christ, sin, etc.), that will lead him to repentance, faith, and eventually salvation. Spurgeon’s doctrine of irresistible grace agreed with that of the Westminster Divines, who crafted this fundamentally precise statement on God’s call and work in the process of salvation:

All those whom God hath predestined unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good, and

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42 Repentance Unto Life, 337.
effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.\textsuperscript{43}

The Holy Spirit is directed by the Father to effectually call each of His elect to salvation. The Holy Spirit never fails in his work, although the sinner, because of his nature, struggles against Him. Eventually, the elect succumb to the irresistible grace of God. The Holy Spirit’s role has now been addressed; but a person must understand what his personal role consists of in the process of salvation. God calls all men everywhere to repent, and the time has come to discover what Spurgeon taught about each person’s individual responsibility to God.

**On the Sinner’s Responsibility**

Socrates was credited with saying that, “An unexamined life is not worth living.” This challenging statement by the Greek philosopher is definitely applicable to the sinner. Repentance seems subjective in nature, so one must take a test to see if he does have true repentance. Charles H. Spurgeon exhorted, “Be not deceived, my brethren, here; examine yourselves whether you are in the faith; ask yourselves if you have that which is ‘repentance unto life;’ for you may humble yourselves for a time, and yet never repent before God.”\textsuperscript{44} The sinner must remember that repentance is an absolute necessity for salvation; and because of that fact, he must make sure that he is truly repentant.

One of Spurgeon’s favorite theologians had advice on seeking the evidences of genuine repentance. A.A. Hodge recommended that one take certain steps to make sure of his repentance: “First, the agreement of our own internal experience with the teachings of the word of God in this subject. This is to be determined by the prayerful study of the Scriptures in connection with self-examination. 2\textsuperscript{d}. The permanent effects realized in the

\textsuperscript{43} *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 54.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 333.
life. These are the hatred and forsaking of secret as well as of open sins, the choice of God’s service as both right and desirable, public confession, and entire practical consecration. These things must be in us and abound.” – 2 Cor. VII 11.45

A spiritual self-exam consists of answers to questions such as these: Do you have a full hatred of all sins because they bring offense to your holy God? Do you search the Scriptures to discover your sins? Do you have a plan to eliminate the sins from your life? Are you fully seeking God’s wisdom to guide your choices? Are you serving God, in a biblical manner, through His church? Do you long for the return of your Savior, Jesus Christ? Negative answers to these questions will reveal a person’s false repentance. Positive answers will help to assure the person that he is on the straight and narrow path with Christ as his advocate.

Spurgeon issued this warning while discussing repentance and faith, “But you do not think it is real. You do not think that the God who made you actually asks of you this day that you should repent and believe. Yes, sirs, but it is real, and it is your procrastination, it is your self-confidence that is the sham, the bubble that is soon to burst.”46 Many people, who thought that they possessed salvation, will be shocked when they are rejected from God’s Kingdom (see Mat 7:21-23; Heb 6:1-8). These people felt God’s presence while having a religious experience; they liked the sound of His word; they liked being in church and hearing the preacher; they liked the company of other Christians; and, they thought that the good things they did secured their salvation. Many people have so much true working knowledge of God, and lead such good lives, that they could fool anyone on this earth. However, all of the knowledge of God that is available to humans

45 Hodge, 489.
46 Faith and Repentance Inseparable, 405.
will not save a soul. The real fact remains that those rejected from the Kingdom were not regenerate, and they absolutely did not turn in true repentance toward God. They did not like the commitment that Christ required. The deceived people loved their sin and they refused to forsake it. The sinners are fully culpable for their own sins, and they will be required to pay the penalty.

Opponents of the doctrines of grace argue that a just and benevolent God would never unconditionally regenerate some people over others. The argument rings hollow, because, in the beginning God created man to be good. Unfortunately, man chose to turn from righteousness, and he was thrust from God’s presence. God has no obligation to save humans from their sin, so no human can demand nor expect that He do so. His perfect plan allows some sinners to remain in their natural state of sin, which they so desperately crave. Sinners prove their willingness to remain sinners by their continuous sinful actions.

No one has the right to be offended at the notion that God chose a select few. As Creator, Savior, and the Sovereign ruler of the universe He cannot be judged on His actions. His grace led Him to select certain souls to bring Him and His name glory. After this universe, and the time and space it is created in, comes to a close, all of creation will look back and finally understand God’s process of saving people. Scripture teaches that God’s process of salvation was this: First, before He created the universe, God unconditionally elected certain souls for eternal life. Those souls eventually were conceived, born into the world, and inter-mixed along with all others. Each of the chosen souls, because they were born sinners, at some point in time sinned against God; and, thusly became condemned under God’s law. God the Father then drew each of the elect to Himself, through the power of the Word (Christ), the word (Scripture), and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit then
regenerated the elect, thereby enabling them to turn to God in faith and repentance. The chosen later repented and placed their faith in God through His Son Jesus Christ. As that activity happened in each individual case, and in His perfect timing, God sent the Holy Spirit to seal their souls, and to reside in their hearts. The Spirit led them to give their entire lives to God by forsaking their old thoughts and lifestyles. They proved their salvation throughout their lifetimes through service to their King. The saints then physically died and were taken into glory to be with God the Trinity forever. Each of these points is so vitally important that if even one of the activities is eliminated salvation has yet to occur. The souls who fail to have each of these processes take place in their lives, it can be surmised, were not part of the chosen race of God. They will be condemned to outer darkness and separated from God for everlasting eternity - for that is what they desire.

Every person’s life ambition should be to glorify his Creator and Savior. Therefore, every person should attempt to discover exactly what must be done to enter into the presence of God. Time has now come to learn Spurgeon’s views on a sinner’s responsibility to God. Spurgeon was speaking on repenting and believing in *Repentance unto Life*, and began by telling people what they should *not* do, “I will tell you another thing: you will try a long time before you will be able to do it. That is not the way to get it. . . If a man says, ‘I want to believe,’ and tries by some mechanical means to work himself into repentance, it is an absurdity, and he will never accomplish it. But the way for him to repent is by God’s grace to believe, to believe and think on Jesus.” In other words, a person can physically attempt to repent in some fashion, and later falsely conclude that he repented. One may read Scripture, understand that he has wronged God, fall to his knees to confess his sins, and shed tears; but, if he failed to realize that it is solely God’s grace that

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47 Repentance Unto Life, 338.
saves his soul, his attempts will fall short. True repentance and belief is affected by the knowledge of God being holy, Christ being the Savior, and the sinner being under His wrath.

Charles H. Spurgeon offered further counsel, “If he picture to himself the wounded bleeding side, the crown of thorns, the tears of anguish – if he takes a vision of all that Christ suffered, I will be bound for it he will turn to Him in repentance.”

For Spurgeon, one’s reflection on Christ that he is to seek in communion (i.e. the “do this in remembrance of Me” command – Lk 22:19), would benefit the seeker of God. According to Spurgeon’s teaching, one’s attempt to envision the work of Christ is a legitimate biblical command for anyone interested in seeking the Lord:

I have never known a man who has thought upon, and taken a view of the cross, who has not found that it begat repentance, and begat faith. We look at Jesus Christ if we would be saved, and we then say, “Amazing sacrifice! That Jesus thus died to save sinners.” If you want faith, remember He gives it, if you want repentance, he gives it, if you want everlasting life, he gives it liberally. He can force you to feel your great sin, and cause you to repent by the sight of Calvary’s cross, and the sound of the greatest, deepest death shriek, “Eloi! Eloi! Lama sabachthani?” “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?” That will beget repentance; it will make you weep and say, “Alas! And did my Saviour bleed; and did my Sovereign die for me?”

Spurgeon believed that God uses the seeker’s thoughts of His Son’s crucifixion to lead him to an obligatory, guilt-ridden remorse which drops him to his knees in conviction, contrition, confession, and commitment. One will not hear of the Savior’s blood-stained body in a present day growth-led church, because it would be an undue offence to people.

Spurgeon’s “The Need and Nature of Conversion” contains his thought on what the seeker of God must do. He spoke of the need of conversion in the sinner, “If a man is to be saved, he must turn from his sins. ‘Right about face!’ is the marching order for every

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48 Ibid., 338.  
49 Ibid., 338. 
sinner. There is no hope of forgiveness for him if he will continue with his face as it now is. He must turn from his sin if he would be saved.”\(^{50}\) Spurgeon gasped at the notion that a “converted” sinner could maintain his selfish ways. The suggestion that one could simply accept Christ and automatically become saved was anathema to him, “Nowhere, in the whole compass of revelation, is there a promise of forgiveness to the man who continues in his iniquity.”\(^{51}\) Today’s decisionism, or, the false gospel message which says that a sinner simply decides to follow Jesus, would have been totally discounted by Spurgeon. He knew the fraud gospel was coming, and this he preached against, “And if a man says, ‘I believe in Christ,’ and yet continues to delight in sin, he is a liar, and the truth is not in him, for ‘faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.’”\(^{52}\) Spurgeon believed that when one repented and believed in Christ his life would turn around; and wonderful, lasting, God-honoring fruits would issue forth from the conversion.

Isaiah 55:7, the basis for Spurgeon’s “The Need and Nature of Conversion,” says, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thought: and let him return unto the Lord.” Spurgeon hoped that the listener would be able to understand the emphasis of this passage: That a true Christian convert will have a life transformation after meeting God. He said that the nature of the conversion deals with the life of the individual, “First, it deals with life. . . Observe that it is ‘his way’ that he is to forsake; that is, his natural way, the way in which he says he was brought up, the way that his natural affections, and propensities, and passions lead him. He must forsake this way, even though it is the way in which he has walked these thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, or even eighty years; he will

\(^{50}\) The Need and Nature of Repentance, 446.  
\(^{51}\) Ibid., 446.  
\(^{52}\) Ibid., 447.
have to get out of this way, however much he may delight in it.” A person is born facing away from God; therefore, Spurgeon believed he must turn from that natural way. The seeker of God must take his thoughts, desires, and deeds that are part and parcel of his natural way, and make a 180 degree turn toward God. Paul tells the reader in Romans chapter six that a man is either a slave of sin or a slave of Jesus Christ. The neutral gray area where one can be in love with the world and in love with Christ is nonexistent in Paul’s thought. A sinner is born on the wayward path; he must turn off that wide and easy road to destruction, onto the narrow and hard way leading towards God.

A sinner must forsake his erroneous natural thoughts of God, creation, humanity, morality, and sin, and accept the Bible’s teachings on these matters. This process can only be accomplished through in-depth Bible study. Spurgeon offered this 5-step plan, produced in “The Need and Nature of Conversion,” as instruction to the seeker: First, a true seeker must begin to think about God. He must begin to dwell, or meditate, on the One True God of the universe. Next, he must yield to Him, or to put it more frankly, he must give up his self-centered will to God’s will. Further, the person must pray to God a prayer such as this: “Turn us, O God, and we shall be turned.” While in prayer, the seeker must cry out to God for mercy on his soul. He must desire righteousness that can only come by having Christ’s sinless life, death, and resurrection applied to his life through salvation. Finally, the person must trust totally in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only way to eternal life. The work a person does, while attempting to gain God’s favor, will be counted as nothing but rubbish on judgment day. Only by relying entirely on the work of Jesus Christ alone can a man be saved.

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53 Ibid., 449.
54 Ibid., 452.
Spurgeon came close to offering assurance in this teaching; but notice how he conditioned the application of salvation to a person’s account by making sure the person had confessed his faith in the Scriptural way:

To believe is to trust; and whosoever trusts Christ Jesus, depends upon the merit of his death, relies upon the excellence of his atoning sacrifice, and proves the reality of his faith by confessing it in the Scriptural way, such a man shall assuredly be saved; and, in order to his being saved, he shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost by whose almighty power he shall be enabled to conquer the sin that still dwells within him.55

Spurgeon said that one can definitely be assured of his salvation, if he had expressed his obligations to God in the proper biblical manner. Spurgeon’s way of offering assurance to a person is the proper manner, and should be emulated by all Christian leaders today. Charles H. Spurgeon’s preaching and writing can speak to the evangelical church of today, if the people would but listen.

**On the Role of the Preacher and Witness**

The Arminian camp, in contesting Calvinism, poses this question continually, “Why must we witness if God unconditionally chooses those whom He will save?” The question must be laid to rest, because salvation is a process that a person goes through from beginning to end. Part of the process is the call that God puts on a soul who has been chosen for eternal life. The call partly consists of a minister or witness who tells people what the word of God requires from them. Romans 10:17 is clear, “Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the word of Christ.” Preaching and witnessing are ways in which God has ordained to spread his word to the world. It is used to help the elect turn to Him in repentance and faith, and it will be used on judgment day as a witness against those who refuse the Gospel. Spurgeon answered the question, “Why is this gospel to be preached

55 Ibid., 453. Emphasis added.
among all nations?” with, “Well, first, because all nations need it; and then, because the gospel is exactly suited to all nations; and further, because God has a chosen number in all nations who will receive the Word, and be saved by it; and also, because it shall be a witness against those in all nations who hear it but refuse to heed it.”

This statement, drawn from the biblical mandate of preaching, puts the question of the necessity of witnessing to rest.

Preaching, teaching, and witnessing are God’s ordained methods of proclaiming the good news; therefore, understanding Spurgeon’s belief about the message the Christian must employ would be beneficial. Spurgeon, in “Repentance and Remission,” said, “So the first part of the subject is, that repentance should be preached in the name of Jesus.” He pointed out; first of all, that repentance could be preached incorrectly. He went on to say that repentance should not be preached simply as a legal duty for the Christian. The sinner has broken God’s laws, but that is not the sole reason to repent. He also said that repentance should not be preached as a matter of faint hope. He used the example of Jonah preaching a message of repentance to Nineveh, so that the Lord may possibly repent Himself (change His mind) from the threat of wrath. Spurgeon also believed that repentance should not be preached to prepare oneself for Christ, like John the Baptist preached, because repentance is not required before God can work in one’s life. This refutes the sinner’s prayer concept that evangelicals stress today.

The repentance a preacher, teacher, or witness should convey is, first of all, that, “Repentance is the gift of God.” Christ the Savior was a gift from God; and that is the foundation that salvation rests on. Spurgeon taught that, “We are to tell sinners that God
gives repentance, that it is one of the free gifts of his grace, and that whoever has it may rest assured that the hand of the Lord has been upon him for good, and that, in fact, the work of salvation has been already begun in his soul.” Spurgeon erred on the side of caution in regards to a person’s salvation. One never hears him telling a soul that he is saved, but only that he should seek true repentance.

Spurgeon said that the preacher should preach the message that, “Wherever there is real repentance, it is the token of the pardon of sin, - not merely a hopeful sign, but, the sure and infallible sign of pardon.” Spurgeon believed that repentance is a sign of God’s work already wrought in the heart of a man; and that it is one of the fruits of God’s efforts in saving a soul. Repentance can only occur to a man if God has regenerated his soul from its natural state. God is the one who opens the eyes of the heart, so that a sinner can see evidence of his hatred towards Him. Regeneration absolutely breaks the sinner’s heart, and he will soon turn to God in penitential faith.

Ministers are to preach repentance on the authority of Jesus Christ. Spurgeon said that preachers are not to simply tell men to repent and then attempt to urge them towards those ends, but they are to take far higher ground than that. Spurgeon looked to Paul as an example, “The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent [Acts 17:30].” Spurgeon concluded that preachers must boldly proclaim repentance because it is Christ’s commission. He said, “So no true minister of Christ need be either afraid or ashamed to tell sinners, and the very worst sinners, that they should repent.” A pastor must first start in the church service. Preaching is meant to bring conviction, and repentance is the activity that man partakes in which brings about a

59 Ibid., 556.
60 Ibid., 556.
changed life. Also, the Lord’s Supper is an extremely important time in the congregation’s life. Communion should be used to bring people to an acute awareness of the magnitude of their sins. Pastors who ignore these advantageous opportunities to lead people to repentance are not fulfilling their responsibility to preach the gospel at appropriate times.

Witnesses must not forgo this commission from the Lord, because all people, regardless of their circumstances, must hear the message of repentance. Spurgeon was adamant about this point, “In like manner, the true minister of Christ is not only to call upon the most moral and the most hopeful to repent, but he is to give the same message to the most immoral and the most hopeless.” All men everywhere, with no exceptions, must hear the message of repentance, and be challenged to obey it.

Spurgeon battled the loss of the love of Biblical truth in his culture. A Christian witness faces a more difficult battle today, because truth is practically ignored altogether. A natural person hardly cares about absolute truth and its origin, so they must be guided there in a loving manner. A preacher’s responsibility is to instill truth in the minds of both the Christian and the sinner in a biblical manner.

**On the Importance of Repentance for the Church**

Charles H. Spurgeon offered a wonderful flowing commentary on Psalm 51 that focused on repentance. King David wrote this penitential psalm after his great sin with Bathsheba. A particular phrase in the chapter is relevant to this study, and should be discussed, “Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem [Ps 51:18].” Spurgeon said that Jerusalem was David’s favorite city, and that it signified the

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61 Ibid., 556.
true church; therefore, David wanted God’s mercy to find its way there. Spurgeon believed that the best interests of the Church should be factored into the doctrine of repentance. He pleaded with those who ignored the importance of the church, “There is surely no grace in us if we do not feel for the church of God, and take a lasting interest in its welfare.”

Spurgeon’s view concerning the importance of true repentance in Christ’s church is supported by Acts 2:37-47. A massive gathering of convicted sinners, after hearing the truth about Jesus Christ, asked Peter and the other apostles what they needed to do. Peter answered, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Immediately the crowd fell in subjection to the authority of the apostles. The new believers suddenly had all things in common with one another, including their thinking. Pay close attention to verses 46-47, “Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.” All Christians are to develop the same altruistic mind, shaped from the same Scriptures. True biblical repentance is the vehicle by which God forms a new mind in the believer, and consequently, brings all true Christians to be like-minded. Therefore, repentance which leads one into Christ’s church is a necessity for anyone claiming to be a Christian.

The American church is light-years away from this biblical example. America has multitudes of separate denominations, and each denomination has several branches, each

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63 Ibid., 407.
branch has many churches, and each church has dozens of people with their own ideas about how his particular church should operate. People must return to the Bible, and follow that by returning to His true Church. God will lead sinners to His church if the church is operating as He commands. Pastoral manipulation and trickery would no longer be needed on Sunday mornings if the above scenario would take place. The doctrine of repentance is the key to restoring the true church to American soil.
CHAPTER SEVEN

THESIS SUMMARY

Charles H. Spurgeon lived in the midst of modernism. It was a time of great interest in secular advances. God’s truth contained in Scripture had been spurned by the culture and Christianity had fallen out of favor. He foresaw the time when man would altogether lose his quest for God’s absolute truth. He also foresaw the gospel message becoming nothing but an emotional plea to accept certain truths about God. Simple faith was abhorred by him, and his heart ached knowing that people were more attentive to the temporal instead of the spiritual.

A look into three of the most popular American preachers, who represent a large portion of evangelicalism, uncovered many alarming problems. The worst problem, by far, is that these three men have a faulty soteriology. They believe that man is in control of his own salvation. They believe that man can turn from his own way, and build up enough faith in Christ to become saved by God. He can then claim his salvation by believing that God has forgiven him, thereby giving him eternal life. Decisionism has taken the Protestant religion by storm. Simple faith has embedded itself within every denomination throughout both England and America, from Spurgeon’s time through today.

No true preacher of God should ever be popular in a culture that mostly despises Scripture and the things of God. The preachers studied have succumbed to postmodernism
themselves. Their churches have become postmodern, and they are drawing in postmodern people by the thousands. The majority of evangelical churches across America have also bought into the simple faith of decisionism. The leaders are emulating these three men and turning their churches into postmodern gatherings of secular people. True gospel preaching is gone and the doctrine of repentance is either blatantly ignored, or at best, totally misunderstood and misappropriated. These preachers believe that postmodern people will be offended by the preaching of repentance. They are ashamed that the Bible calls all men everywhere to repentance. Their actions attest that repentance was only meant for earlier generations. The true Church has been hit hard by this phenomenon, because sinners are being led into places called a Christian church, and they are left unsaved through weak teaching and a severe lack of reliance on the Holy Spirit. Therefore, many tares are sown and remain in the field of wheat.

The study turned to Charles H. Spurgeon for his excellence on the topic of salvation through faith and repentance. He taught that salvation is by God’s grace alone. God initiates it and He sees it through to the end. The requirements that God holds man accountable for in the process of salvation, such as regeneration, faith, and repentance, are given him entirely by God. So, it is by God’s initiative and by his power that a soul can be saved for an eternity. Spurgeon had much to say about repentance and its necessity in salvation. He taught exactly what repentance is, and what it is not. He taught on how a Christian should seek repentance, and how a preacher should go about preaching it. He also commented on Psalm 51 and gave great insight into the importance of repentance for a healthy church.
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Charles H. Spurgeon, it has been said, created such a tremendous wealth of work that scholars can easily study him and claim him as the authority on just about any religious matter. That notion is good to be aware of, and it does apply here. Charles H. Spurgeon, by no means, is the most knowledgeable man, past or present, regarding the doctrine of repentance. However, he taught Scripture, and he never shirked his responsibility to preach what he discovered during his preparatory studies. When Spurgeon approached the subject of repentance – he preached it. He taught the doctrine with no fear of losing his pastoral position; and, he actually enjoyed teaching repentance because he knew that it was a gift from God (to His glory), for the good of the sinner. He viewed repentance as the blessing that it was. The blessing holds true for today, as well, if the church would but realize it.

Many current church leaders believe that the 21st century American culture should dictate how a pastor leads his church. They believe that preachers should alter their church services in order to accommodate postmodernism. By unmasking those who most strictly adhere to the church growth movement (i.e. Osteen, Hybels, and Warren), one must agree that a compromise from biblical principles to cultural preferences leaves them with a building void of maturing Christians, and filled with nice sinners. The results from this
study strongly suggest that a pastor refrain from altering his church to suit the prevalent philosophical movement. Those in the past who attempted the switch to a modern form of worship were sorry; and the same will hold true of those today who switch to a postmodern form of worship.

Current evangelicalism has lost the vital doctrine of repentance. The doctrine has disappeared from America’s pulpits, and been neglected by the clergy because of its radically challenging nature. Exponential growth of individual churches governs what is delivered from the pulpit. A pleasing and soothing new gospel has come forth in the 20th century to lure the masses into churches. The new gospel meets people’s perceived physical and emotional needs, and ensures them that God’s love and sacrifice covers their sins. The new gospel is automatically appropriated when the person prays the sinner’s prayer to God. Protestants sit in their pews each Sunday believing that they are saved with a simple faith, when in reality they lack salvific faith altogether. They have been told to “decide for Jesus,” but they have decided for a false Christ [Matthew 24:24].

Those who hold to Arminianism and Semi-Pelagianism can in large part be blamed for this phenomenon. The fruit of their defective soteriology is today’s new evangelical gospel that contradicts God’s eternal gospel given throughout Scripture. A sinner is no longer challenged to undergo a thorough mind and life change in order to prove his salvation and discipleship under Christ. A simple prayer brings the blessings from heaven down upon the soul, according to evangelicalism’s gospel. Fortunately, God’s word gives us His gospel [Mk 1:1], which is forbidden to be changed. No one is allowed to subtract or add to the true gospel; therefore, those who eliminate repentance and only preach a
simple faith in Jesus are in opposition to God. May Paul’s charge in Galatians 1:9-12 motivate Christians to rely solely upon God’s gospel:

As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ. For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”

The Lord can save a soul without aid from any man or woman. He has chosen, though, to use Christians to help Him proclaim His gospel by calling sinners to repentance and faith. He blesses His gospel as it goes forth, and in due time, He works out the intended results. God’s eternal gospel results in true conversions, blessed assurance, and fruit bearing Christians who live their lives to glorify God. When a person alters God’s gospel, and presents a human derived gospel to a soul, it fails to receive God’s blessings and power. Salvation will not result from the issuance of a false gospel. Evangelicalism’s new gospel results in spurious conversions, false assurance, and spiritually blind hypocrites.

Believers all share the responsibility to evangelize the lost. Christians must first seek the elements of God’s gospel found only in The Holy Bible. The biblical gospel is this: Repentance and faith begets eternal salvation and fruit bearing service to the Lord. The soul winner must learn about each of these elements and then learn how to communicate the principles found in each of them to a lost soul. Christians can evangelize to the best of their ability, and then step back and allow God to bring forth the good fruit of salvation. The properly motivated efforts by the Christian, even though imperfect, will be blessed by God and will achieve God’s intended results for each person who hears His message.
“God is now commanding all men everywhere to repent.” This Scriptural command will be in effect until the consummation of the ages. Repentance is, in fact, a wonderful blessing to the sinner who has finally realized his sinful plight. What joy to discover that your Creator has given you a second chance in life! A fresh start with a renewed mind and a forgiven soul awaits you if you carry out true repentance and faith in God through His Son Jesus Christ. Let God’s work bear fruit in your life.
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