

Repentance Leads To Christ-like Character

*“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory,
are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory,
which comes from the Lord, Who is the Spirit.”*

(2 Corinthians 3:18)



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Embracing Our Father's Covenant And Becoming His Child Requires Your Whole Heart

Consider this amazing grace of our heavenly Father: Through the precious shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ we are offered a New Covenant of redemption and reconciliation and spiritual intimacy (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 9:15). In essence, He is inviting each of us to become His son or daughter in union with the Spirit of Christ. He's asking you, "Do you want to live in a relationship of loving trust and obedience with Me? I will be your Father and you will be My child."

How great is the mercy of the authentic Gospel from our loving and compassionate Father! He cares so intensely for those His own Son redeemed so we could be adopted as His children:

*"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the power [permission, right] to become **children of God**, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but **born of God**" (John 1:12,13).*

Spiritual birth is far different from physical birth. We need the "spiritual eyes" of God's perspective to perceive His invisible Kingdom: *"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is **born again**... **Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit**" (John 3:3,6). This is birth into an entirely different father-child relationship than you may have experienced with your earthly father in his weaknesses (or absence).*

Spiritual children living in union with Christ have a whole new set of "family" responsibilities than you may have been raised with: *"For whoever **does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother**" (Matthew*

*12:50). The Spirit of Christ lives within those who love Him, and He makes clear to His own how to put God's Word into practice. In other words, He gives us the power and the desire to *do our Father's will* (Philippians 2:13). In this intimate relationship our Father has graciously given us the responsibility to discern from His Spirit *what His will is* and to purpose that His will is *our way of life*.*

To enter into the New Covenant our Father offers you so you may become His child, the Bible makes clear five stipulations that encompass a heart that is born from above—stipulations that evidence a *whole heart response* to the Father Who has called you to be His.

The moment a baby is born represents just the beginning of his or her earthly journey. So too when you're born again in spiritual rebirth, it's just the beginning of your *pilgrimage toward your salvation*.

From our Father's perspective your life is a journey of transformation into ever-increasing Christ-likeness until the moment the KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS proclaims your name to the hosts of heaven—the culmination of your salvation.

Each of the stipulations we discuss below calls for your wholehearted determination as you respond to our Father's invitation to embrace His Covenant. The Bible Jesus knew and made full the meaning of was the Hebrew text which is now called the Old, or Older, Testament. Therefore it's essential that we today explore the meaning of Hebrew words which English has unintentionally limited. For example, the Hebrew word for "faith", *emunah [eh-moo-NAH]*, is filled with deep, impassioned undertones. *Emunah* emanates from your heart, reflecting confidence and unwavering,

child-like trust in the faithfulness of your Father.

Most English translations errantly use the word “believe” in reference to someone’s trust in God. To *believe* something, however, only acknowledges agreement rather than life-altering relationship. Believing is a passive response, an intellectual assent to a concept, such as ‘God exists.’ But the emotional commitment within *emunah* reveals a level of love for and trust in your Lord to which nothing else compares (Matthew 10:37; John 12:25).

In light of the intensity and steadfast certainty represented in *emunah*, it’s important to recognize that our Father isn’t looking for mere mental acceptance of His stipulations. Rather, He’s searching your heart for yearning to be born again in spiritual union with Christ and to share a lifelong Father/child relationship with Him. Let’s review these stipulations.

Your Salvation Pilgrimage both begins and continues throughout your life with:

1. ***your repentance*** (Acts 2:38,39);
2. ***your agape love*** (Luke 10:27);
3. ***your obedient trust*** (Matthew 18:3);
4. ***your forceful determination to follow Jesus*** (Matthew 13:44-46);
5. ***your forgiving others*** (Matthew 6:15).

[For more on your pilgrimage to your salvation and our Father’s Covenant in Jesus, see our Hebraic Article: *The Gospel of the Covenant Is the Pilgrimage to Salvation*. It’s a free download on our website.]

From our Father’s perspective, if Jesus isn’t Lord OF all in your life, then He’s not Lord AT all in your life. And if the will of your heavenly Father isn’t of PRIMARY importance to you, then He’s of NO importance to you.

The reality of *wholeheartedness* in your

relationship with your Father is revealed in your repentance, love, trust, determination to uphold your part of the Covenant through His grace, and your readiness to forgive others. Each of His stipulations is actively demonstrated through the way in which you live your life. Your response to these stipulations—these *ongoing expressions of your union with the Spirit*—aren’t something you can just talk about academically. Rather, they’re discernible signs that you have embraced your Father’s Covenant and have been born again as His child (1John 3:1,2; 5:2).

Repentance Leads to Growth in Christ-like Character

The first stipulation for embracing our Father’s Covenant is for you to *repent* of your sins (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15; Acts 2:38). Repentance is the gateway to you entering the Kingdom and becoming more like Jesus, the King of all who embrace His Father’s Covenant. Every day you live on earth our Father wants you to grow more like our Lord Jesus, being transformed into His nature and character. The following sequence is the pattern for this to take place:

1. Confession
2. Repentance
3. Sanctification
4. Becoming more like our Lord Jesus.

The Greek word for confess, *homologeo*, means that you *agree* with God that you have sinned against Him. Your confession demonstrates to your Father that you recognize you’ve violated your relationship with Him by breaking one of His righteous commands.

But agreeing through confession that you’ve sinned is just the first step. Your Father wants you to be changed and

develop the character of His Son, Jesus. In other words, He wants you to *replace* your sinful thought/action/attitude with the righteous character qualities found in His commands and exemplified in Jesus. This takes place when you repent.

The Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*, means not only that you've changed your mind about that sin, but that you also feel the sorrow of how your sin hurt your relationship with your Father and you *want to change*.

When you repent:

- Your heart hurts because you feel the pain of what your sin did to your relationship with your heavenly Father. Through walking in the darkness of sin you've broken fellowship with Him and His Son (1John 1:6). When you repent, you grieve that you have grieved His Spirit through choosing to sin (Ephesians 4:30). That grief is the "*godly sorrow [that] brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret*" (2Corinthians 7:10; see also Acts 2:37-39).
- Your grieved heart compels you to not want to commit that sin against Him again. In order to discover the way to live which pleases your Father, you search out His commands in the Bible that teach you how He would have you live (Psalms 119:11; John 17:17). Through the work of His indwelling Spirit, you put these into practice rather than continuing in sin (1John 3:6-8).
- The fruit of this heartfelt process is that you become more like our Lord Jesus in another facet of your character. Each time you confess a sin to our Father and repent by turning away from it and turning toward His forgiveness and righteous ways, His Spirit helps you develop the character qualities of Christ. Confession plus repentance yields *sanctification*, being set apart as holy for God's use. This ongoing process may be

interpreted as the changes the Spirit makes in you to become more like our Lord Jesus.

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, Who is the Spirit" (2Corinthians 3:17,18; see also 1Thessalonians 5:23; 2Thessalonians 2:13; 1Peter 1:2).

Repentance: Replacing Your Sin With God's Gracious Commands

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24).

While you still live and breathe, our Father's desire for you is to become more like His Son, Jesus, living in righteousness and holiness. The Bible calls this ongoing process of transformation "*sanctification*." You leave behind something unholy in your old desires and ways; your perception of that "old self" no longer holds you captive. Instead, you determine to choose the way of life Jesus would live if He were you.

Your repentance is accepted by our Father as genuine when you hate your sin and its control over your life, and agree with Him how much you need to be forgiven for violating Him. But struggling to turn away from your sin *without* crossing over into life in Christ and purposing to live God's way is futile! In other words, you can't patch God's good and righteous ways onto your old self and keep living according to your old ways.

Think of a bridge over which you cross, leaving behind the power of Satan over your life so that in Christ you can walk in His light on the other side (Acts 26:18). If you stop in the middle of bridge, satisfied that you've left behind your old ways but haven't pressed on with loving resolve to *live God's way*, you'll be drawn back to your sinful inclinations. That means your "repentance" is halfhearted and you've deceived yourself.

But if you DO press on eagerly to receive Father's forgiveness and the power of His Spirit to walk according to His commands, you'll grow in new character qualities to become more like Jesus, Who embodies the Word of God. It's only then that your repentance is indeed genuine.

The **funnel** to the right illustrates the process of developing Christ's character through sanctification. Consider these important points which correspond to the numbers on the funnel diagram:

(1). Being born again is only the first step on your pilgrimage to eternity in heaven (Romans 6:22). Enroute, your Father desires that you become more like your Lord Jesus as you grow in obedience by His grace (2Corinthians 3:18; 1John 4:17).

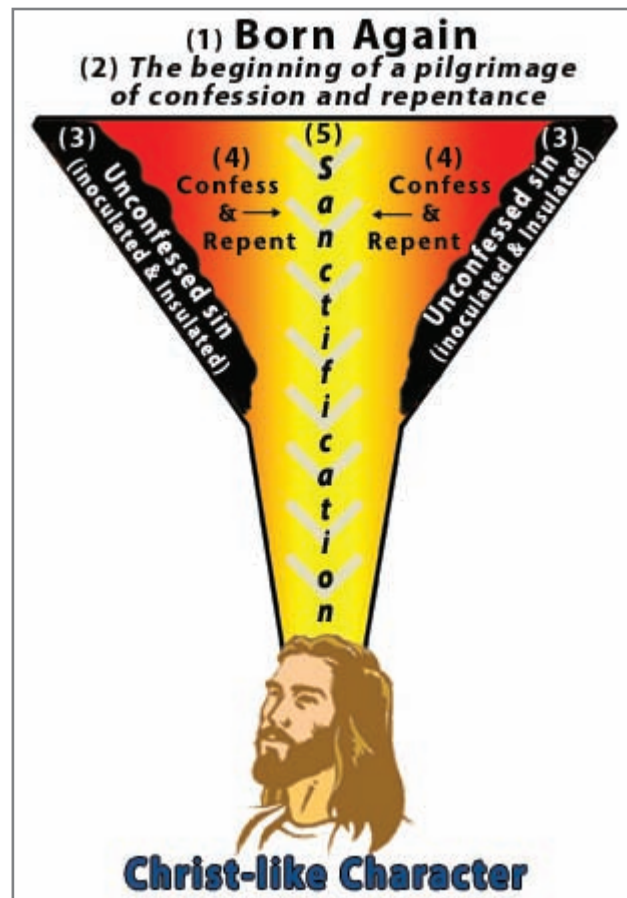
(2). In order to accomplish your transformation into Christ's character, our Father purposes that each of His children make His righteous commands their way of life (Philippians 2:12,13). When you miss the mark of His will and sin against Him, He calls you to confess and repent of that violation so that your fellowship with Him may be restored (1John 1:9).

(3). The sides of the funnel represent unconfessed sin. People who hold on to unconfessed sin are refusing to become more like Jesus. They're loving their sin more than

they love Him. Inoculated to the depravity of their sin in God's sight and insulated from any need for confession and repentance, many within contemporary Christendom are failing to grasp the seriousness of our Father's intent for sanctification into Christ-like character.

(4). Those who do take ownership of their sin can access through confession and repentance their return to the path of sanctification. Remember, our Father purposes that throughout our lives we be increasingly conformed to the character of our Lord Jesus and do His will.

(5). Sanctification into Christ's character requires remaining in the center of the funnel. You proceed down the funnel through making God's commands your way of life (John 14:23). The further down the funnel you go, you find your love for our Lord



growing and a deeper desire to obey His commands (John 14:15). In essence, the further down the funnel you go, the more you're becoming like our Lord Jesus in sacrificial love and character.

Your motives and way of life will be a living testimony to the Spirit of Jesus in you to empower you to become more like Him. This ongoing transformation evidences that you've truly been born from above. The Book of Acts testifies to the dramatic change that occurred whenever people were born again (Acts 19:6,18-19). On the other hand, the absence of this sanctifying transformation may be a clear indicator you were never born again and do not have His Spirit within you.

Do You Know What Sin Is?

"Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him"
(1John 3:3,6).

For such a small word, *sin* has a lot packed into its meaning. The original translation means "to miss the mark" of God's righteous commands. Ongoing violations of His righteous ways demonstrate there's no relationship with Him in Christ, while confession and repentance restore the relationship as we press on to practice righteous living (1John 3:7).

- The Bible describes sin as breaking or transgressing God's law (Leviticus 5:17; 1John 3:4).
- Sin is also defined as disobedience or rebellion against God (Deuteronomy 9:7) and independence from His will (James 4:17).

Many sins are spelled out plainly in the Bible. For example, the Ten Commandments present a clear picture of

God's righteous directives for how He would have us live. Keep in mind that ALL of God's commands in both Testaments have been given to show us what *love for Him* and *love for one another* looks like, whether in what we do or refrain from doing. Listening to our sin nature rather than responding according to the Spirit directly opposes love.

"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21; see also Ephesians 4:22-5:5).

Scriptural principles can also be extrapolated from commands which have been given earlier in a particular context. Paul does this when He cites an Older Testament command, *"Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain"* (Deuteronomy 25:4) to apply the underlying principle of sustaining an individual who ministers to others (see 1Corinthians 9:9-14 and 1Timothy 5:17,18). In this case it would be *sin* to not give adequate provision to the person who is spiritually helping you.

As you seek out of grateful love to learn and live by our Father's commands so you won't sin against Him, you may recall that a certain command in the Newer Testament is building off a more complete explanation of it in the Older Testament.

Recognize that remaining ignorant of what our Father considers sin does not make you innocent. We were all born guilty, slaves to our sin nature and under God's wrath. Only in Christ, as we confess and repent of our sins, can we be con-

sidered righteous, that is, forgiven and accepted in our Father's sight (Leviticus 5:17; 1John 3:23,24).

Throughout Christendom today is a casual, even negligent, approach to God's commands. Having perverted biblical grace to mean disregard for God's righteous laws, many live according to their own desires and the ways of the world, deceived into thinking God doesn't mind since they're "already forgiven."

However, living in Covenant with our Father requires that His children learn what *He* considers to be sin and determine by His Word if they're violating His commands and displeasing Him. Multitudes have chosen to remain ignorant of our Lord's commands and are suffering the consequences of their sin without knowing why they're being chastised.

The Newer Testament reveals that there are dire consequences for intentionally sinning against God. Ananias and Sapphira considered themselves to be followers of Christ yet entertained sins of deception and greed; they paid for it with their lives (see Acts 5:1-11). Paul turned Alexander over to Satan because of his blasphemy (1Timothy 1:20). Jesus warned the faith community in Laodicea to repent of their worldly idolatry and independence or He would spit them out (Revelation 3:16-19).

When we share in the Lord's Supper as followers of Jesus, we are spiritually participating in the body and blood of Christ (1Corinthians 10:16). Our Father views this participation as renewing our Covenant with Him and there are serious repercussions for partaking with unconfessed sin:

"That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have died. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come

under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world" (see 1Corinthians 11:23-32).

Our Father disciplines us because He loves us, authenticating His Fatherhood of us through the Spirit of Jesus in us (Hebrews 12:6,7). Just as an earthly father is grieved to have to take action to alter the course of his child's willful rebellion, so our Father grieves to have to chastise us even though it's for our good. Discipline confirms that we are His legitimate children being conformed into the image of Christ so we can share in His holiness (Hebrews 12:10).

Our Father intends that our trust in His sovereign love and purpose for our lives intensify in the midst of His chastisement so that righteousness and peace will come from it (Hebrews 12:11). The fruit of righteousness and peace are the same inward and outward changes we hope to see in our own children as they learn from our rebukes and actions. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live (Hebrews 12:9)!

Why Does Modern Christendom Ignore God's Requirement To Repent?

So many within Christendom ignore sin in their lives, preferring to think of it as a "problem" rather than a violation of a holy God. Research reveals that pulpit preaching that might lead to repentance began to disappear in Protestantism when congregations began to incorporate in the 1950s. Up until that time few faith communities were incorporated by the state. When church gatherings became an incorporated entity, banks began to lend them money to build larger places to congregate. Those loans resulted in clergy being saddled with paying mortgages.

Not wanting to lose bill payers, preachers turned away from sermons about sin and repentance and resorted instead to entertaining messages. Seminaries began to instruct pastoral candidates in the art of attracting and expanding seeker-friendly audiences of satisfied spectators. This change in focus was initially disguised as a new form of evangelism as many evangelists began to remove the need for repentance as the initial step in conversion at their crusades.

Out of this move toward *attraction through entertainment* the “Church Growth Movement” began to emerge in the 1960s, becoming the standard of much of contemporary western Christianity. Tragically, the centrality of the cross and the need for repentance to be forgiven in Christ was replaced by “seeker sensitive” methods which ignored sin altogether. “Church” became a performance venue to attract and retain those who were willing to add to the coffers.

Today so many Christians in this nation sit among crowds of complacent people every Sunday who hold on to unconfessed sin. They’ve been inoculated and insulated against our Father’s requirement for repentance and the need to become more like His Son, Jesus. Blinded to the Biblical mandate to develop Christ-like character through sanctification, they’re content to stay “just as they are.”

Until this past century various presidents and Congress called for repentance and prayer whenever this nation encountered severe difficulties. They recognized they were experiencing hard times because of widespread sin throughout the country. Sadly, from pulpit to presidency, any perceived *need* for national repentance has disappeared. Perhaps that’s why the call to repentance is so absent today especially throughout Christendom.

There’s a difference between remorse and repentance.

Repentance is such a critical part of our pilgrimage to salvation because any attempt on our part to deny or rationalize our sin disregards both God’s holiness and our own capacity to be deceived.

True repentance always demands a heart conviction that you both *turn away from* a sin (your violation of our Father’s commands) and that you *turn to Him* and discover what His Word requires of you in obedient trust.

Because of our love for our Father and our Lord Jesus, we are emotionally sensitive about our relationship with our God. We can feel the hurt our sins cause Him. Instead of just acknowledging we’ve sinned, we grieve that we violated a relationship with Someone we love so much. And, our keen willingness to truly repent evidences that we want to remain humble and responsive before Him.

Your Father has given you His Spirit so that you’ll have ears to hear whenever He speaks—especially when He nudges your spirit that you’ve missed the mark in some area of how He would have had you respond. Your yieldedness out of a loving desire to please Him makes transformation into the character of Christ that much more of a cooperative “work in progress” as His workmanship (Ephesians 2:10).

This gives our Father *hope* that your love for Him is greater than your desire to keep on sinning, that is, to hang on to the sides of the funnel with unconfessed, unrepented sin. Biblical hope may be defined as *a confident expectation that our Father’s will and purpose will be yours also.*

Whenever we’ve sinned against Him or done something to offend another

person, for that matter, repentance that leads to change is necessary to restore the relationship. Our Father is in a position to bring about the circumstances and encounters that can motivate you to change. But an offended person needs hope that you really will change in order to heal the relationship. And, their hope begins when they see that *you* are hurt because you hurt *them*.

Unlike repentance, remorse is just a feeling of disappointment that you got caught or that you regret what you did wrong. Remorse fails to take into account the relational hurt your sin or offense has caused someone else. When you're remorseful, your heavenly Father knows you're not determined to change, and the person you offended has no hope that you do intend to change.

In God's sight, remorse is inadequate and worthless, a subterfuge that makes you think saying "I'm sorry" is all that's necessary. But only true repentance can restore the relationship you've fractured and heal the hurt your sin or offense caused.

Ask yourself: When you've done wrong or caused emotional pain to others, do you repent because you feel the hurt you've caused, or must you be convinced and persuaded that you've even wronged them?

Helping You Detect Sin

In the lessons to follow in this series, *Repentance Leads To Christ-like Character*, we'll be discussing specific sins cited in the Bible. We want to help our Father's children recognize where they may be sinning against Him, since that topic has been so neglected in the past few decades.

When Christians habitually sin, they bring down the name of the One Whose

reputation they are carrying. Yet so few even seem to recognize that people who have yet to encounter Jesus are negatively influenced about Him by the worldly, sinful lives of those who say they follow Him.

Our Father is a God of love and compassion Who longs to have fellowship with those in His Son who have been cleansed of unrighteousness when they confess and repent of their sin. However, He will not set aside His holiness so that we might straddle worldliness and still perceive we have fellowship with Him. He has called us to restore that fellowship by *acknowledging our sin* through confession and *changing our direction and response* through repentance. That's not *earning* anything; it's being led by His Spirit and walking in the steps of our Lord.

It's our hope that we can help our brothers and sisters in Jesus—our Father's children—live abundantly in righteousness so they may enjoy intimate fellowship with Him and live a life pleasing to Him.

We leave you with this encouragement that our Father does withdraw His chastisement when genuine repentance takes place:

"If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned"
(Jeremiah 18:7,8).