

**“And this Gospel  
shall be preached...”**  
Matthew 24:14

**Sermon Summaries from Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God**

## **Seven Steps to Effective Repentance**

by Leon Walker

Repentance is the foundation on which we build our Christian lives. In his booklet, *The Unpardonable Sin*, Mr. Herbert Armstrong explains what repentance is. I will quote a section from page 13.

“Repentance is a *change of mind* and ATTITUDE. It is a change *from* this carnal attitude of hostility toward God—of rebellion against God’s Law, to the opposite attitude of love, submission, obedience, and worship of God, and reliance on Him. It is an ‘about-face’ in attitude and *intent*, to THE WAY of God’s righteousness.

“Repentance means that you come to really SEE yourself as you ARE—as God sees you—as a self-centered, hostile, shriveled-up, rotten, vile, filthy, sinning hulk of rotting human flesh, unworthy to breathe the free air God gives you! It means to be so SORRY, not only for what you have *done*, but also for WHAT YOU ARE—that you so ABHOR yourself that you come, emotionally broken up, throwing yourself on God’s mercy, asking His forgiveness, and His redemption! It means *wanting* to be made righteous.

“To REPENT means a total *change* of ATTITUDE and HEART! A *continuously* repentant attitude! For God’s Spirit will dwell *only* in such a mind!”

But, do we know *how to repent effectively*? In II Corinthians 7, Paul concentrates on this matter

*of how we can repent effectively* in our daily lives and grow more Christ-like as time goes on.

### **The Carnal Corinthians**

Paul wrote two letters to Corinth that are preserved for us in the Bible. I Corinthians was a very corrective letter in which Paul pointed out serious sins existing among the members of God’s Church at Corinth.

The Church was divided into factions (some following one minister and some another). Their approach toward Paul was critical, hostile, and suspicious—not at all the right kind of approach they ought to have had toward *any minister and the Apostle Paul* in particular.

Some members were guilty of open sins—fornication is mentioned specifically. Some had problems in their marriages. Others were not properly using the *spiritual gifts* God had given to them for the ministry at that time. Some did not understand the resurrection properly. Heresies were beginning to develop.

I would say that brotherly love was not much in evidence in the Corinthian Church. Brethren were even going to courts and suing one another there at Corinth.

Paul summarized the situation by saying, “You are carnal; you’re not as spiritual as you

ought to be”—the letter was very, very stern and corrective.

### The Repentant Corinthians

But the letter produced the right result. It moved the brethren to *repentance* as we find in II Corinthians 7:8-10. Paul says: “Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that *you sorrowed to repentance [a change of mind]*.” This is real repentance—they sorrowed to the point that they *changed* their way of living.

### Formula For Repentance

Paul goes on to say in verse 11: “For behold this selfsame thing, that you sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!”

So, Paul speaks here in verse 11 on *what repentance is all about*—what it produces in your life.

### Carefulness or Diligence

The first point Paul brings out is *carefulness*. The word actually means “diligence.” This is one of the main qualities that a person must have in order to repent effectively. Certainly the Corinthian Church in the past was not very diligent. In fact, they were rather *casual* about their sins. They were negligent of spiritual duties and responsibilities. They were indifferent to the sins going on in their city and also in the Church.

In Matthew 26:41, Christ said to Peter: “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation [trial or test]: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

We so often find that the things we want to do, we don’t do. The things we know we ought to be doing, we’re not. On the other hand, we often find that we’re doing those things we don’t want to do. So here is a statement of fact: the spirit may want to do right things, but the flesh is so weak. Jesus said to overcome we’ve got to *watch* (be spiritually alert, mindful of the things we should be doing) and *pray*. Otherwise, we’re not going to have the strength and character to do what is right.

We find Peter also expounding this, beginning in II Peter 1:4, “. . . whereby are given unto

us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all *diligence* [it’s the same Greek word translated ‘carefulness’ in II Corinthians 7:11] add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance [or self-control]; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness love.”

Here are attributes of spirituality we desire to have in our lives. We want to replace the sin, lust, vanity, greed—all of the wrong things—with these spiritual qualities that are right.

Peter goes on to say in verse 8: “. . . if these things be in you, and abound [if they’re growing in you], they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give *diligence* [he begins the section by saying we have to be diligent and now he ends the same way] to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”

To have a true and effective repentance, we must be diligent. We must have a serious approach and attitude toward our life and our sins, not take them casually, not be indifferent or take them for granted.

### A Good Reputation

Point number two that Paul brings out in II Corinthians 7:11 is that they sought *a clearing of themselves*. (Actually the word in the Greek means defense—or I would put it in my own words: Seek a good reputation or seek a good name.)

Their reputation was rather bad. Their character had been besmirched by their wrongdoings.

I would think that the people there at Corinth would want to do any and everything they could to erase that reputation. And this is what Paul said they were doing—they were seeking to clear their name. They were seeking to have a good name and a good reputation.

Now obviously there’s only one way you can

do that—change your life, stop doing the wrong things you were doing and now begin to do the right things that you ought to be doing.

While we might have been a little ashamed to admit we came from Corinth, because of Corinth's terrible reputation, I think if we were living back there, we would be happy and pleased to admit being from Thessalonica—because their reputation was very good.

I Thessalonians 1:3, 7-8 says: "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father . . . ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing."

One aspect or ingredient of repentance: a desire to clear your reputation of the sins in your life by doing good.

### Indignation Against Sin

Point number three that Paul mentions is *indignation*. Why do we need to have anger or indignation against our sins? For one reason—it is a tremendous impetus toward overcoming. How can you eradicate something from your life unless you hate it? If you view it as "not too bad," then you're not going to be that concerned about it.

But if you feel and believe and think that even your least sin is a horrible thing to God, then you'll have a far greater impetus to overcome than if you just feel indifferent.

Again, let's go back to I Corinthians 5:1-2. We look here at one of the open sins that was being committed—everybody knew about it. "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife [probably not his mother, but the father's second wife]."

What was the Church's attitude about this flagrant sin? "Ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned." The Church was putting up with this sin and others.

How can you repent, how can you turn from your sin, if you feel the way the Corinthian

Church felt? How can you overcome anything that's wrong in your life, unless you believe that everything that is against the laws of God is evil and despicable, and you're ashamed of it and you hate it?

In Romans 12:9, Paul states: "Let love be without dissimulation [without pretense]. *Abhor [hate] that which is evil*; cleave to that which is good." You have to hate evil, abhor it, detest it, loathe it, despise it.

These people at Corinth didn't hate sin at first—but eventually they did after Paul's scolding. If you come to the point that you can hate the sins in your life enough, you will change, you will get rid of them, you will overcome.

### Fear of God

Another impetus to overcoming that Paul mentions (point four) is *fear*. God is talking here, through Paul, about that kind of terror that is unwholesome and unsound, but a positive fear—a right frame of mind that we all should have.

The guiding principle of our lives should be faith and hope—everything that is optimistic, looking to the Kingdom of God, expecting to be there. But, on the other hand, in the back of our minds, there should be a right kind of fear. There are many fears we have in this world that are good.

In Hebrews 3, Paul shows how Israel of old could not enter into the Promised Land because of their disobedience and especially because of their *unbelief* and lack of faith. He also warns us, the Church of God today, in chapter 4:1: "*Let us therefore fear*, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." So that's the kind of fear that we ought to have—a right fear, a fear to do wrong.

### Vehement Desire

Point number five: Paul said that the Corinthian Church also had a *vehement desire*. How can you change unless you really *deeply* want to change? If you're unconcerned, if you couldn't care less, if it's not important to you, obviously, there's no way you can change. We must desire vehemently, as the Corinthian Church did, to want to change—to be more like God daily, to be more Christ-like,

to emulate their examples and their way of life. This has to be a paramount goal in our lives—a vehement desire.

Christ tells us in Matthew 5:6, in the sermon on the mount, “Blessed are they which do *hunger and thirst after righteousness*: for they shall be filled.” And the implication I get from this is that those who do not hunger and thirst for it, won’t be filled. In order to be filled, you have to hunger and thirst.

In I Peter 2:2 (any parent will understand this), it says: “. . . as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby . . .” How does a newborn baby desire milk? Again every parent knows that a little baby when it wakes up doesn’t just blink its eyes and stretch its arms and yawn two or three times and begin to casually look around the room and patiently wait for Mom to feed it. The brain is connected to the stomach without much in between! And as soon as that four hours is up, click, the eyes open and “WAAAAAH!” just like that, the baby immediately, *loudly, vociferously* wants food. It doesn’t gradually begin to cry—it’s *full force*, until finally it’s fed.

If we are going to repent and grow spiritually as we should, as we must, we have to desire it, we must crave it and want it wholeheartedly and energetically.

In Psalm 51, which as we know is the classic chapter concerning the attitude of repentance, David said: “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.”

David is crying out with the *utmost sincerity* and *intensity* in his life: “Wash me, cleanse me, scrub me, bathe me, totally and completely—get rid of these evil sins in my life.” That’s the kind of attitude and approach we have to have.

Again, the brethren at Corinth began to vehemently desire to change, and they did.

### Zeal

Point number six is *zeal*. So many people don’t change because they’re not as zealous as they ought to be.

In Revelation 3:19, Christ says to the Laodi-

cean Church, which was the very opposite of a zealous, repenting Church: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.” You have to have the zeal, the drive, the continual effort. Laodicea was lukewarm, casual, indifferent. But Christ says: “No, you’ve got to be zealous. I’m rebuking you. I’m chastening you. Be zealous, repent, and change your life.”

Galatians 6:9 says: “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not”—continue that zeal, continue that love, continue that determination to follow and serve God completely and totally.

### Revenge

And now, the last of these seven points: *revenge*, which means to vindicate that which you have done. It doesn’t mean that you will forgive what you have done, Christ’s blood does that. It doesn’t mean you atone for it, Christ’s blood does that also. It doesn’t mean that you can erase the sin by any fruit or action you do. But, this means that you recognize what you have done and that recognition leads you to *correct that which was wrong*. It has to do with correction—doing the right thing now.

The kind of approach we should and must have is to look at our past and to correct it—to now lead a right life and do those things that are profitable rather than injurious.

### Repentance Brings Forgiveness!

Finally, what is the end result of all of this? Putting all these steps of repentance together, what is the fruit?

Notice the latter part of II Corinthians 7:11, “In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.” In other words, “Your sins are forgiven!” This is the end result. And this is what we all want to hear from God. As we come before God in repentance, in prayer, and ask for help to overcome our sins, God will say: “Your sins are forgiven, they’re wiped away. They’ve been removed.”

Let’s turn back to II Corinthians 7 from time to time and meditate upon these principles. We can each have a more effective repentance in our lives and become more the kind of person that we ought to be spiritually!