**TOTAL REPENTANCE: THE IMPOSSIBLE GOSPEL**

***Romans 6:1-6***

Sunday School Lesson 5

*Answers to Questions & Misconceptions About Salvation*

08/18/2019

**Introduction:** As we have seen already in this Sunday School series, many of the common misconceptions about salvation are derived out of a skewed perspective or misunderstanding of the Word of God. This ought not to surprise those who are true Bible believers because we can clearly see this as a standard tactic that Satan uses to draw people away from the simple Gospel message. This week, we will observe another common misconception that claims to have Scripture’s backing – total repentance for salvation. This is the belief that a person can only be saved if they totally and completely repent of their sin. The person who believes this false teaching no longer sees himself as a sinner, or he is constantly trying to regain his salvation. There are also others who don’t hold to this belief personally, but they have heard from others that salvation means to totally repent from all of their sins. As a result, they have never come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ that is found in faith alone. The LDS church is the most prominent present-day propagator of this false doctrine. In addition to their many other false teachings, the LDS church has told their followers that they may only obtain the third tier of Heaven if they have totally repented of all of their sins. Unfortunately, they are not the only false religion that teaches this erroneous doctrine. There are many others both in the United States and around the world. Let’s study how we can best respond to those who believe in total repentance.

1. A PERSON MUST FIRST UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS TO “REPENT.”
2. **We can explain to them the definition of repentance.** The word *repent* in the Greek is transliterated to the word *metanoia,* which has a literal meaning of “a change of mind.” Generally, it is understood that this change of mind is a result of the remorse or sorrow felt for the current state or position held. The word *repent* by itself does not have a direct tie to sin. Often, we associate repentance with sin, but the reality is that we can repent of any number of things. Interestingly, the term “repent of sins” is not actually found at all in the word of God. When dealing with the “total repentance” crowd, we must understand that they are specifically speaking of a total repentance of sin. Further, we must address the fact that their definition is often skewed. Repentance to them is not just a change of mind. To them, it means that they are now totally going to live a life free from sin. It is a complete turn of direction from sin. They believe that even one sin invalidates a person’s eternal security. Consequently, from their misguided understanding, anyone who sins was either never saved or has fallen away from that salvation which they had first received.
3. **We can show them the various Biblical usages for repentance to further understand its meaning (Genesis 6:6; Exodus 13:17; 1 Samuel 15:11; Psalm 110:4; Jeremiah 4:28; Ezekiel 14:6; Matthew 21:29, 27:3; Hebrews 12:17).** It is interesting to note that repentance is used more referring to the Lord than to any other person in the Bible. If this word had a natural connotation of sin, it would cast a very wrong picture of who the Lord is. There were times where Israel or others brought the swift judgment and wrath of God. After the Lord would initiate or pronounce this judgment on people, there would usually be some who acknowledged the error of their ways and turned back to the way of the Lord. When this would happen, the Lord would then repent of the judgment that He had proclaimed. This is similar to a parent who may proclaim punishment to a child but then change his mind and not punish the child after seeing the child’s humbled response. The Bible tells us that Judas actually repented as well. Some take this to mean that Judas was saved, but his actions after repentance certainly do not seem to bear that out. Judas had changed his mind about betraying Jesus. That’s why he went to return the money. Of course, the Jewish leaders just laughed at him. Judas had such great remorse over this betrayal that he took his own life. He repented of his action, but we do not see for certain that he ever believed.
4. A PERSON MUST THEN UNDERSTAND WHAT REPENTANCE MEANS FOR SALVATION.
5. **We can share our agreement in acknowledging the need of repentance as a precursor to salvation (2 Corinthians 7:7-10; 2 Timothy 2:25).** In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul addresses his sharp reproof that he had given to the people in Corinth in his first letter. Paul knew that his letter had made them sorrowful. At first, he repented (changed his mind) regarding the letter, as he was afraid that he had offended them and caused them to stumble. Then, he saw that their sorrow had prompted them to repent. Consequently, he noticed a picture of the beautiful innerworkings of sorrow, repentance, and salvation. It is only through sorrow, regret, or grief that a person changes their mind or position. To put it clearly, we change our minds when we see the error of our ways and the harm that it causes. This is why Paul told Timothy to instruct the lost. He knew that the instruction may prompt the lost to acknowledge the truth of salvation and of the bondage of their sins. Repentance is a natural preemptive exercise before a person puts their faith in Jesus Christ.
6. **We can show them what we are repenting from (Hebrews 6:1; 2 Peter 3:9; Acts 2:38, 3:18-20, 17:29-31, 20:21; Luke 5:32, 13:3, 15:10; Matthew 21:29-32).** As mentioned earlier in the lesson, the Bible never uses the expression “repent of sins.” That does not necessarily mean, though, that we are not to repent of our sins. Jesus clearly said that He came to call sinners to repentance. On the other hand, Jesus said that He did not call the righteous to that same repentance. What does that mean? Obviously, the righteous have no need to change their mind. From their perspective, their way is the right way. In Acts, the connotation is that the men needed to repent of their rejection of Jesus Christ. Again, they felt that they were justified in what they had done to them. When they finally realized that they were sinners and needed a Saviour, it was time for them to repent now as sinners. The book of Hebrews explains that our repentance is from dead works. What are those? They can be summarized as any way in which man tries to achieve eternal life except through Jesus Christ. They are works of the flesh but not of God. They are corruptible instead of incorruptible. Through the realization of his sinful condition, a person must repent (change his mind) of whatever avenue he was trusting in and put his faith in Christ for salvation. Obviously, this change of mind should naturally lead to a change of behavior. It is hard to say that you have changed your mind if you continue doing the exact same thing that you are doing now. This speaks to the fruit of repentance that should be in the life of every Christian (Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8).
7. A PERSON MUST UNDERSTAND THAT MAN’S PROMISE OF NO FUTURE SIN FOR SALVATION PLACES A WORKS-BASED CONTINGENCY UPON HIS SALVATION.
8. **We can ask them to show us an example from the Bible where someone made such a promise upon receiving salvation (Romans 6:1-2).** Sometimes, the best response to someone who believes something is to ask them where they find it in the Bible. As we look throughout God’s Word, we do not find any examples where a person ever made a commitment upon salvation that they would never sin again. Obviously, they had a newfound hatred for sin. There were times where Jesus sent people away and instructed them to sin no more. That is clearly the goal of every believer. Yet, there is a big difference between striving for perfection and agreeing to perfection as a condition of our salvation. Such a distinction is the difference between a works-based salvation and a grace-based salvation.
9. **We can show them a salvation based on a commitment to never sin is a return back to relying upon the law for salvation (Galatians 2:21, 5:4; Romans 3:28, 9:32; Ephesians 2:8-9; Acts 15).** The idea that a commitment to “turn” from all of our sins is necessary for salvation is a clear frustration of the grace that comes through salvation by faith. It is really no different than striving to follow the law in order to have our works justified by God. Instead of it being a present-tense commitment, it is just a future-tense commitment masked as something that is based in faith. There were many struggles during the early church with the Jews who wanted to teach following the law and salvation together. In Acts 15, we are reminded of the incident where certain men tried to combine circumcision with salvation. Circumcision was a picture of the commitment that a person made to live separated for God. These men needed to understand that the act or commitment associated with circumcision was not what saved the Old Testament or New Testament saints.
10. A PERSON MUST UNDERSTAND THAT THE BIBLE SHOWS US THAT THE BELIEVER STILL BATTLES WITH SIN AFTER SALVATION.
11. **We can show them that many of the New Testament epistles were written to address sins that were taking place within the church (2 Corinthians 12:21; 1 Timothy 5:20; 1 John 1:9, 2:1; Revelation 2:5, 3:3-19).** If salvation were only possible through a total turning from sin to God, then we would have to be of the opinion that the members of the early church were not saved. Much of Paul’s writings to the churches was for the direct purpose of addressing problems that were occurring in the churches as a result of sin. In Jesus’ message to the early churches in the book of Revelation, He addressed their shortcoming and encouraged them to repent. Are we supposed to view His admonition as indicating that these churches consisted of people who were not saved? Certainly not.
12. **We can show them examples from men like Paul and the disciples to show the foolishness of their belief (Romans 7:23-25; Matthew 5, 8:26; John 18:27).** It was not just members of the early church that battled with sin after salvation. We find the same battle taking place among the leaders of the church. In Romans, Paul spoke of the constant inward war that he faced between the mind of the Spirit and the body of the flesh. Peter and the disciples repeatedly lacked faith, which is not pleasing to God. Let’s make sure we help people understand that salvation is not found in a “total repentance” of sin.