

# True Repentance

by Zac Poonen

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*Zac Poonen emphasizes the essential connection between true repentance and faith in experiencing the fullness of the gospel.*

**Duration:** 25:24

**Scripture:** Isaiah 53:6, Ezekiel 14:3, John 1:14, Acts 20:21, Romans 3:23, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 1 Thessalonians 1:9, James 4:17, 1 John 3:4

**Topics:** "Repentance", "Faith Formation"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes God's promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that He will never allow us to face trials beyond our ability to bear, likening trials to resistance training for spiritual strength. It discusses the importance of repentance and faith as inseparable responses to the gospel, highlighting the need to turn away from sin and trust in Jesus. Repentance is described as a continuous attitude of turning from known sins, leading to a deeper understanding of what constitutes sin and a desire to align with God's glory seen in Jesus Christ.

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## Transcript

God's grace is sufficient for our every need. God has promised for his children in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 13 that he will never allow us to be tempted or tested beyond our ability to bear. But with every trial or temptation, he will make a way to escape so that we can endure it.

First of all, why does God allow trial and temptation to come into our life? It's something like our subjecting our physical muscles to resistance to make our muscles strong. All muscles in the human body are strengthened or developed through being subject to resistance. When people lift weights, when they run or use expandable springs or any such thing, always the principle is subjecting your muscles to resistance.

And as a result, the muscles become strong. If you don't subject your muscles to resistance, you never become strong. You just become fat.

Eating food by itself does not make a person strong. It just makes them fat. And there's a world of difference between a fat person and a strong person.

Apply this spiritually. Getting a lot of Bible knowledge just makes you spiritually fat. And fat people are actually weaker than thin people.

And a lot of people with a lot of Bible knowledge are pretty weak spiritually. They still lose their temper. They still lust with their eyes and commit many other sins despite all their Bible knowledge.

Are they strong? Certainly not. They're fat. But God allows us to face trial and temptation so that we can become strong.

And He has promised us that He will never allow us to be tested beyond our ability to bear. That's a wonderful promise. That means if I see a particular trial coming into my life, I need never say to myself, Oh, this is too much for me.

No. Nothing is too much for me. It's within my ability to bear it.

If I don't believe that, I'm accusing God of having less sense than an ordinary school teacher. And I'll tell you why. If a student is studying in the 5th standard, the school teacher in his class will not give him a 7th standard question paper.

No. That school teacher has got wisdom to give that child a 5th standard question paper. Because the teacher knows that this student is not capable of answering a 7th standard question paper.

So it's the same with trial. God will not allow you to face a 7th standard trial if you are in the 5th standard right now. And therefore, when you face a trial, if you say this is too much for me, you're actually accusing God of having less sense than a school teacher.

And I'll tell you something, it's the devil who makes you think like that. Because the moment you think like that, you've already failed. You've programmed yourself for failure by saying this is too much for me.

I want to say to you, no trial is too much for you. If you're a child of God, God determines what type of question paper you get. And he will only give you something according to the level of your spiritual development in life.

Now this is a great comfort for me. Supposing, for example, the devil has got some massive temptation lined up for me to face tomorrow, which is too much for me, I'm not strong enough to bear it. But the devil's got to get permission from God before he sends that temptation into my life.

And he asks God, can I send this temptation to Zach? God says, no, I'm not going to let you do it, because he's not strong enough to face it. And then after a month, the devil says, can I send it to him now? God says, no, he's still not strong enough. Maybe after a year, God says to him, OK, now you can tempt Zach with that temptation.

He's strong enough now. He's developed in the last one year, and now he's strong enough to face it. And that's when the temptation will come to me.

And by the power of the Holy Spirit, I can overcome it. It's like when I get to the seventh standard, then I get the seventh standard question paper. I won't get it in the fifth standard.

This is a tremendous comfort for me to know, because this applies all the way through life, right up to the end of my life till Christ comes again. I will never get a question paper that's too tough for me. That means every temptation I face can be overcome, because none of it will be too strong for me.

There are students who got 100% in mathematics, first standard, second standard, third standard, fourth standard. They work hard, and they get 100% in every year. But if you had given him a seventh standard question paper when he was in the fifth standard, he would not have got 100%.

He'd have probably got 25% or 30%. It's possible for us to get victory over sin. All the time, just because of this one promise in 1 Corinthians 10, 13, God will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability.

We must believe that. You can never overcome without faith. You don't believe that God is faithful.

That's what it says in 1 Corinthians 10, 13. God is faithful, and his promises is faithful not to allow you to be tempted beyond your ability to bear. The Bible speaks about repentance and faith as the two things necessary for us to receive all that the gospel offers.

Jesus preached repentance and faith. Peter preached repentance and faith. And the apostle Paul says, who brings them both together in Acts 20, when he's talking to the elders in Ephesus, he says, I've been preaching to you for three years.

And what have I preached to you for all these three years? I have solemnly, verse 21, testified to everybody that they must repent towards God and have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. These are two things that God has joined together, repentance and faith. And the Bible says what God has joined together, no one should separate.

Now, when you combine two atoms of hydrogen with one atom of oxygen, you get water. You separate it, it's no longer water. You take one atom of sodium, an atom of chlorine, put it together, you get sodium chloride, which is common salt.

You separate them, it's not common salt. It is sodium and it's chloride. Repentance and faith is the only appropriate response to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You separate them, it's no longer the correct response to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It will not produce the result that the gospel is supposed to produce. Unfortunately, a lot of preaching today emphasizes only faith.

It's like saying, we need oxygen in water. We need oxygen, we need oxygen, oxygen, sure, but you need hydrogen too. You need to have two atoms of hydrogen with one atom of oxygen and then you get water.

And if you keep on emphasizing oxygen, what you get is oxygen, not water. So if you keep on emphasizing faith, you're not going to get a correct response to the gospel and people will not experience what the gospel offers. And this is the tragedy in Christendom today.

Many, many people are not experiencing the wonderful blessings and privileges of the gospel because preachers have separated what God has joined together. Repentance is not a very popular message to preach because it's dealing with sin. And so people emphasize faith.

That sounds more positive. Repentance sounds a bit negative. And preachers like to preach something positive.

But you need the positive and the negative just like in electricity. You can't have just a positive. You need a positive end and a negative end for the current to flow.

You can't have all positive. No. No current will flow that way.

It's the same way. Repentance is a negative turning away from sin. And faith is the positive putting our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you don't have both, you cannot have experience the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so we can say that a lot of Christians today do not have a proper experience of the gospel. That's why their lives are so unsatisfying.

And most Christians will admit if you ask them honestly, I'm not satisfied with my Christian experience. Why are they saying that? Because they've been fed with an incomplete message. They've been taught faith without being taught repentance.

Repentance is the primary step before you can come to faith. Repentance means turning away from everything other than God to God Himself. One of the clearest definitions of it is found in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1. 1 Thessalonians chapter 1. We read like this.

In verse 9. You turned to God from idols. Notice there. You turned to God from idols.

What is an idol? The clearest definition of an idol is something that takes the place that God should have in your life. It's not just an object of wood and stone. Those are external idols.

More easily identified and much more easy to get rid of. Anything external we can get rid of easily. Relatively speaking.

It is the idols inside the heart that are more difficult to get rid of. There's a verse in the Old Testament where the Lord told the nation of Israel through one of his prophets saying that these people. This is in Ezekiel and chapter 14.

Ezekiel was a prophet to the backslidden Israelites in the land of Babylon. They were sent to Babylon because of their sin. And the Lord said to Ezekiel saying, Listen to me, son of man.

Ezekiel 14 and verse 3. These men have set up their idols in their hearts. Should I be consulted by them? Am I going to answer these fellows who got idols in their hearts? So you find that an idol is not something that you just have outside of you. He goes on to say, Therefore speak to them and tell them.

Ezekiel 14.4 Any man who sets up his idol in his heart and then comes to the prophet and says, Ask him something. The Lord, I the Lord will be brought to give him an answer in view of the multitude of his idols. The Israelites had many idols in their hearts.

And it's the same with Christians today. Anything that takes the place of God in your life. It could be your business.

It could be your house. It could be your girlfriend. It could be a boy.

It could be your bank account. It could be stocks and shares. Anything that takes the place of God in your life.

And if you want to find out what is taking the place of God in your life, ask yourself, what is it that you think about the most when you have some free time? Now, when we go to work, whether it's in an office or a

factory or anywhere, you have to concentrate on your work out of necessity to earn your living. Okay, let's leave that aside. If a student goes to school or a college, he has to concentrate on his studies.

And that is the right thing to do. But, when we have finished with our school or college or office or factory, and you're free to think about whatever you like now, what do you think about most of the time? That is your idol. It could be sport.

It could be music. It could be... And some of these legitimate idols are much more serious than the illegitimate ones. Because they don't look like idols.

So, repentance means I'm turning away from everything that's coming between me and God. I'm turning my back on it. The word repentance means a change of mind.

And one of the best ways to describe it is the military about turn, where a person turns around 180 degrees from his old position. So, that's it. You know, my old way of life was following after sin.

I turn away from that, put my back to sin and put God in front. I turn my back not only to sin, but to anything that took the place of God in my life. If you haven't done that, your repentance may only be partial.

You may have turned your back on certain things, but not on everything. And then, of course, your repentance is partial and your experience of the gospel will also be partial. For example, if I want to travel from Bangalore to Bombay, I turn my back on Bangalore and instead of turning 180 degrees towards Bombay, I turn, say, 135 degrees, I'll end up in Goa, not in Bombay.

And a lot of Christians end up where they're not supposed to end up because they didn't turn around from sin 180 degrees. They did turn, but not fully. This is the reason why many people don't progress in their Christian life.

Their repentance is not total. They have not turned from everything they know to be sin in their life. Let me tell you something more about repentance.

And that is, repentance is not something you do once for all when you're beginning your Christian life. It's a continuous attitude of turning from every known sin because as we grow in the Christian life, we will discover newer and newer sins, which earlier on we did not think were sins. That's been my discovery over the last 25-30 years.

I have been constantly discovering sin in my life. What do I mean by sin? In the Bible, there are many definitions of sin. Let me just read you a couple of them.

1 John 3 and verse 4, it says, Sin is lawlessness, violating the command of God, doing something that you know is wrong. You know in your conscience this is wrong and you do it. That is sin.

Now that's a sin of commissions, a sin that you commit. Another type of sin, which many people don't think about, is the sin of omission. That means something you were supposed to do, but you didn't do.

That's described in James chapter 4, where it says in the last verse, verse 17, The one who knows the right thing to do, but does not do it, it's sin. The Levite and the priest who walked by the beaten man on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, you read in the story of the Good Samaritan. What did they do? What was their sin? They didn't kick the man.

They didn't spit on him. They didn't call him any bad words. They just ignored him and walked on the other side.

They sinned, the sin of omission. If they had kicked him and called him bad names, that would have been a sin of commission. They did not do what they were supposed to do, help this man.

Do you know the number of sins of omission that you have done in your life, which you've never even thought of? Normally speaking, we confess only sins that we commit. Lord, I did this wrong thing. I did that wrong thing.

I did that other wrong thing. Can you think of a time when you have confessed something like this to the Lord? Lord, I should have helped him, but I didn't do it. I should have spoken a kind word there, but I didn't speak it.

Forgive me, Lord. I should have prayed there, but I didn't pray. I should have sought some fellowship with you in the scriptures, but I didn't seek it.

There are many sins of commission. When we come into the presence of God, we get light on these sins. And when we get light on these sins, we can turn from it.

So the closer and closer and closer we come to God, the more and more and more we get light. On what is sin and what is not sin. And so as we discover new areas of sin in our life, we turn from that.

And then next year, I get light on something more that is sin in my life, and I turn from that. So if I'm walking with the Lord, my whole life will be one of repentance, repentance, repentance. I'm turning, turning, turning, turning from the new things I'm discovering to be sin in my life.

So what is the clear definition of sin? Here we saw two of them. Violating the law. Going beyond outside the line God has drawn.

The other is not coming up to the mark. Not doing what I should have done. Now let me turn to what is the best definition of sin altogether that I've found in the scriptures.

In Romans 3.23 it says, All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. So sin is coming short of God's glory. That means God's standard is 100% and I come below that.

Anything I come below that, I'm sinning. What is the definition of the glory of God? In John 1.14 it says that we beheld the glory of God in Jesus Christ, full of grace and truth. So the glory of God was seen in the earthly life of Jesus Christ.

So as I look at the earthly life of Jesus Christ, I see what holiness is. Anything less than that, anything contrary to that spirit is sin. Is coming short of the glory of God.

So now we get a very helpful definition of sin. Anything unchrist-like in my life. And the Holy Spirit will show me what is unchrist-like.

When I see it, I turn from it. And I say, Lord, I want to be like you. That is repentance.

It's not reaching the goal. It may take me ten years to be like him. But I've begun.

I've turned around. And I say, Lord Jesus, I want to turn to you. That's repentance.

Then our faith becomes useful. The two join together and we progress in the Christian life. God bless you.

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