

Th122 Foundation Doctrines

Lesson Th122 - 4 Repentance: Change of Thinking

For thousands of years people thought the earth was flat. They believed that if you traveled to its edge, you would fall off! In 330 BC the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, provided evidence that the earth is actually round. It would take hundreds, and in some places thousands, of years before people would change their minds. They were slow to believe that the earth is actually a round sphere.

In a similar way repentance involves a change in the way a person thinks. Someone might say that they have repented. If, however, they continue to think, speak, and do the things they have always done, then they have not truly repented.

The apostle Paul was a very religious Jew. His name, in the Hebrew language, is Saul. He was born in the Roman city of Tarsus. Saul grew up in Jewish society and was raised to obey the Jewish law. He studied the Old Testament and eventually became a student of the most renowned Jewish lawyer of his time. That was a Pharisee named Gamaliel. The Pharisees were the Jewish lawyers of their day, who studied to become experts on Jewish law. The Law was based on the Old Testament books written by Moses. Pharisees claimed Moses as their source of authority in what they taught. Saul admits that he was the ultimate Pharisee, obeying every letter of the Jewish law. He was very passionate about what he believed. He was so passionate that after the death and resurrection of Jesus, he began to persecute all Christians. He believed that Christian Jews were disobeying the Jewish law and were teaching others to do so as well.

A great persecution came upon the Early Church. One of the Christian deacons, a righteous man name Stephen, was arrested and tried before the Jewish high priest. He was found guilty on false charges. His accusers dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death. The men who participated in the stoning of Stephen took off their outer robes and laid them at the feet of Saul. He kept their robes safe as he watched in approval of their stoning of Stephen (Acts 6:8-8:1).

Saul began to persecute the church in Jerusalem. He would take temple guards with him to break into the homes of Christians. He had them dragged away in chains. But his zeal could not be satisfied with Jerusalem alone. He heard that Christians had fled from Jerusalem and were now preaching Jesus in Damascus. Saul then went to the high priest and obtained letters addressed to the Jewish synagogues in Damascus. The letters gave him authority to arrest Christians—whether men or women—and bring them back to Jerusalem as prisoners.

Gathering a small band of temple guards, Saul set out on the long trip to Damascus. It would take him four to six days of travel to get there. We might imagine Saul's thoughts as he approached Damascus. We can assume he was making plans to meet with the various Jewish leaders and to find the names of all those who had become Christians.

Saul and his entourage were almost to Damascus when something extraordinary happened. A brilliant flash of light surrounded him and he bowed to the ground. Then a voice began to call out to him, "Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?"

Saul was shocked and afraid. "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," the voice replied. "Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do." And with that the light disappeared and Saul was alone. The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless. They had heard the sound, but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So, they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days Saul did not eat or drink anything. He was still blind and very confused. Can you imagine the thoughts going through his mind? Everything that he had ever believed had been challenged. The persecution of the followers of Jesus had been the very focus of his zeal for God. But this Jesus had called to him from blinding light. This Jesus who was supposed to be a mere man and who had been crucified and buried was not dead, but alive! This risen Christ had appeared to him in a supernatural way! How could this be?

Unknown to Paul a disciple of Jesus, named Ananias, was living nearby. He was about to have his own encounter with the Lord. "Ananias!" The Lord said to him in a vision.

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

The Lord commanded him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

"Lord!" Ananias answered in fear. "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name!"

But the Lord said, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel."

And so Ananias, with great fear, went to the house where Saul was staying. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came here, has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again. Saul stood to his feet and was baptized as a Christian. He immediately began to preach in the synagogues of Damascus that Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 9:1-20).

This is an amazing story of the transforming power of Jesus in the lives of men. Saul, who was convinced that he was being zealous for God by persecuting Christians, had a complete change of mind and heart. He went from being a persecutor to becoming a proclaimer.

True repentance will result in a change of thinking. The change in thinking will result in a change of behavior. This is a very important concept. Some Christians try to have new believers follow a list of rules. This is not true repentance. Our lives and behaviors change, not because we have a new list of dos and don'ts but because our hearts and minds have been changed.

True repentance will always include a change of thinking. We have also learned in previous lessons that Godly sorrow leads to repentance and that repentance involves confessing our sins to God.

This lesson is **important** because it teaches that true repentance will always include a change of thinking, not just a new set of rules to follow.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that it is the Holy Spirit that leads a person to repentance—feeling godly sorrow, confessing their sins, and changing both their thinking and behavior.

Let us **review** this lesson with the following questions:

1. What happens to the way we think when we truly repent? [Pause]
A. If you said that repentance includes a change in the way we think, then you are correct.
2. What did the apostle Paul do to the church before he became a Christian? [Pause]
A. If you said that he persecuted the church, you are correct.
3. What happened to the apostle Paul on his way to Damascus? [Pause]
A. If you said, “Jesus appeared to Paul in a blinding light,” you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to watch this lesson at least three times until you are able to accurately tell the story of the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus. Then, find someone and tell the story to them. Discuss how important it is to have a change in thinking when you repent.