



INSIDE

MINISTRY UPDATE

New Ministry in
Malawi, Africa..... 2

VERSE OF THE WEEK

Ephesians 4:22–24..... 3

FROM OUR FOUNDING FATHERS

George Washington 5
John Quincy Adams..... 6
Samuel Adams..... 7
Thomas Stone 8
Thomas Jefferson 9
Noah Webster..... 10

ABOUT

Capitol Ministries® 12



How to Effect Change and Growth in Your Life



What you are about to read is not anything that you will find in typical, secular, pump-you-up, self-help seminars.

It has nothing to do with what personal growth gurus hawk in countless audio series, their volumes of books, or in fiery seminars after they roll into town with much fanfare and bluster to teach you how to live in the moment, aim for the stars, and grow into your greatest and most powerful self.

What you are about to read has nothing to do with any of that panoply. What follows instead is the biblical formula

Continued next page

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WEEKLY BIBLE STUDIES

Former Cabinet Members / White House Senior Staff: Wednesdays 7 am, Zoom.
Senate Members: Tuesdays 8 am, rotating offices, hot breakfast served.
House Members: Thursdays 8 am, The Capitol Hill Club, hot breakfast served.

The views expressed in each Bible study are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the position of any individual Bible Study Sponsor.



■ MINISTRY UPDATE

New Ministry in Malawi, Africa



Dr. Andrew and Dr. Wezi Mkwaira of Malawi, Africa attended the Fall Teaching and Training Conference in Washington, D.C. in September. After successfully completing the training, the couple is readying to launch a discipleship Bible-study based ministry to national political leaders in Malawi.

Andrew is the executive pastor of Christian International Assembly in Malawi. Wezi, a graduate of Michigan State University, is an associate professor of horticulture at LUANAR-Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

The couple already has a long relationship with Lazarus Chakwera, the prime minister of Malawi who is also a pastor. Prime Minister Chakwera planted the church where Andrew is an assistant pastor and is a member there.

While he has ministered to national political leaders unofficially, a partnership with

Continued on page 4

How to Effect Change and Growth in Your Life

for growth, which stands in dire and stark contrast to the world's notions of how to achieve that.

Unlike the idealistic commodities that are bought and sold today, the biblical formula for growth is not pleasant, nor is it ego-gratifying. Rather, it's hard work and has everything to do with coming to the end of yourself and understanding the critical need for repentance and turning from sin.

Read on, my friend.

Ralph Drollinger

I. INTRODUCTION

The Bible has much to say about how a person can change; as a matter of fact, the Scriptures reveal that those who are in Christ will change for the better.¹ But how exactly does this change happen? Or better, how is the believer—to use the appropriate theological term—sanctified? In addition to all the secular theories regarding achieving personal growth and change for the better, at least four major historical/theological views are proffered in answer to this question. But as you will see, only one of them has a solid biblical basis. Very briefly they are as follows:

A. TOTAL PERFECTIONISM

The first, known as Christian Perfectionism, stems from Charles Wesley, the historic English leader of the Methodist movement. Herein, a sup-

posed second work of grace, post-salvation, catapults the believer into a state of “sinlessness.” Another name for this flawed view is “entire sanctification.” The believer may make mistakes, but supposedly he is no longer sinning. Spiritual growth is indicated by increasing good works. Simply put, in a real-world sense, Wesleyan Perfectionism is problematic in that the perfect person's spouse only needs to be asked if he or she is perfect. Practical reality suggests that total sanctification/perfectionism is not achieved by any believer in this life, nor is such a view supported by Scripture.

B. PASSIVE GROWTH

A second widely held view of sanctification is the Keswick (pronounced “Kezeek”) School of thinking. In this understanding, believers passively grow in their relationship to Christ. A believer needs only “surrender” to



grow spiritually. Just keep drinking in the Bible, and you will mature. “Let go and let God” is an appropriate summary of this way of thinking. But as will be seen in the following two views, God’s grace enables human responsibility in the sanctification process. There is a biblical expectation for the enactment of human volition in the achievement of spiritual growth.

C. PENANCE AND REMORSE

This third position, which is commonly practiced in cults, is known as *penance*. Whereas the previous two positions are practiced in error among those with a biblical soteriology (i.e., a proper understanding of what the Bible teaches about true saving faith), *penance* is the idea of imposing something as a punishment for sin. In other words, penance is a human attempt to balance the scales. In the world of penance-seekers, neither justification (one’s salvation) nor sanctification (one’s spiritual growth) is imputed from God via His enablement (as per the truths of 1 John 1:9 and many other passages). Rather, a person’s salvation and his sanctification are earned via self-effort or personal merit. In this way of thinking, it follows that if a person is saved by personal merit that he grows by personal merit. An individual is sanctified by conducting offsetting good deeds, works or prayers in order to propitiate (satisfy) his wrongdoings; in other words, he is “guilted” into changing. The problem is, likened to the former positions, there is no substantiated biblical basis for such a belief or practice.

D. PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION

The fourth position on sanctification is the view supported by Scripture: Progressive Sanctification. The Bible repeatedly reveals that a lifelong cycle of *repentance* and renewal progresses a believer toward Christlikeness, and this process of growth will only be complete when the believer goes home to be with the Lord. There is no perfection this side of heaven. Growth and change are accomplished through the active participation and discipline of the believer whom the Holy Spirit prompts and energizes for the task. Philippians 2:12–13 and many other passages support this summation on sanctification:

“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

Notice this passage closely. **Work out** (the Greek word *katergazomai*) is not referring to salvation by works² (cf. Romans 3:21–24; Ephesians 2:8, 9; John 1:12; Romans 10:9) but rather is descriptive of the responsibility that the believer need possess after being saved by God’s grace. And the fact that **God is at work in you** evidences the causal agent (God) who engenders and empowers the **working out** of sanctification in the life of the believer after being saved. Other passages that support the biblical teaching of Progressive Sanctification include Philip-

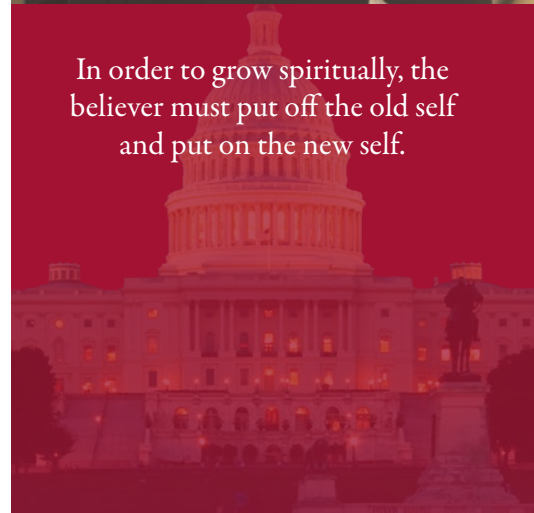
♥ VERSE OF THE WEEK

Ephesians 4:22–24

That, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.



In order to grow spiritually, the believer must put off the old self and put on the new self.





Continued from page 2

Capitol Ministries has provided an intensely biblical methodology that has been tested over more than 25 years in the political arena, Andrew said.

“Over the past several years I have had an increasing burden and awareness to minister to leaders of government with the belief that as they are changed, the nation is changed and transformed,” Andrew said. “I was asking how I could do this better. This conference came at the right time. This is a Providential connection. This is a critical mission not just for eternity, but for the here and now as well. Through this ministry I pray I can be involved in making a contribution toward transforming our leaders and our nation for Christ.”

pians 3:13, 14; Romans 6:19; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27, 15:58; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Galatians 6:7–9; Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 3:1–17; Hebrews 6:10–11, 12:1–2; and 2 Peter 1:5–11. Each passage underscores Progressive Sanctification, wherein ***God who is at work in you*** is the One who prompts the believer, and his responsibility is to ***work***, i.e., taking personal responsibility to achieve spiritual growth as God directs in his heart.

II. SCRIPTURAL BASICS RELATED TO SANCTIFICATION

The aforementioned listing of Bible passages are all worth noting and pondering before moving further along in the further development of this study (but are in accumulation, too lengthy to include in what I hope to be limited to a 12-page study on the matter). In summary, human responsibility, i.e., ***working*** at your sanctification is catalytic to change. But more specifically, how? What follows are the four fundamental scriptural basics related to Sanctification.

A. ALL CHANGES SHOULD ALIGN WITH SCRIPTURE

Since the Bible is inspired by God, it is the basis of all truth. “He is there, and He is not silent,” wrote Francis Schaeffer. In other words, God has not only revealed Himself to man in the advent of His Son Jesus Christ, but also in His Holy Word. Scripture therefore need be the sole epistemological source (that is, the sole grounds for knowledge) as

it relates to a person’s faith, practice and changes. Notice Scripture’s internal testimony regarding itself as it relates to change:

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

The Greek construct of this important passage is best translated as follows: “All Scripture is given by inspiration....” One of the specific purposes God ***inspired*** Scripture is for ***proper teaching, reproof, correction and training***; all these words connote change that is informed and guided by scriptural truths. Add to this understanding the following:

“For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Scripture states of itself that it intends to ***perform a work in you***—that is, to change those who believe in it. Accordingly:

Since the Bible is God’s Word to man, then every change a believer desires to make should align with His ordinances.

Importantly and to the point in our outline, the ***Scriptures*** are the basis for achieving right changes. Second Cor-



inthians 10:5 echoes and summarizes this first point when it says, *“taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”*

B. ADMONISH ONE ANOTHER WITH SCRIPTURE IN ORDER TO PRODUCE CHANGE

The second fundamental scriptural basic related to change can be gleaned from 1 Thessalonians 5:14. Paul states, *“We urge you, brethren, admonish [noutheteo] the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”* Change occurs when a believer is confronted by the truths of God. Change results, according to 1 Corinthians 1:18, because God’s Word has power—power to change individuals when they are confronted by it:

“For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

Isaiah 55:11 amplifies this same astounding truth:

“So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”

It, therefore, follows that the Word of God is the conduit that needs to be utilized in counseling or mentoring (or better, *admonishing*) another to change.³ States Hebrews 4:12 in summary of the importance of the Word

to create change, *“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword....”* God often uses other believers through their friendship or writings to amplify His Word in our lives. Looking for this amplification and being open to it is how God intends to create biblically based change in your life.

C. THE REACTION TO SCRIPTURAL ADMONITION NEEDS TO BE REPENTANCE

Building from the first two points relative to scriptural basics related to change is how a person responds to being *admonished* by the Word of God. How you respond to being *admonished* by the Word of God is very important if you are to grow. Pivotal to this understanding is 2 Timothy 2:25, which says:

“With gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.”

The proper biblical response to the *admonitions* of the Word of God is not “I don’t need to change; I am already perfect,” nor “I’ll just let go and let God” nor “I’ll balance the scales myself.” To the contrary of these aforementioned aberrant views of the sanctification process, this passage reveals that *repentance* (*metanoia*) which means “a change of mind, direction and purpose” is the key to the believer’s growth process. Importantly, Scripture reveals here and elsewhere (cf. Acts 5:31, 11:18; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:9,

George Washington



“Direct my thoughts, words and work. Wash away my sins in the immaculate blood of the lamb, and purge my heart by thy Holy Spirit, from the dross of my natural corruption, that I may with more freedom of mind and liberty of will serve thee, the ever lasting God, in righteousness and holiness this day, and all the days of my life.”

— George Washington, first President of the United States, Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, member of the Continental Congress, President of the Constitutional Convention, “Father of His Country,” judge.

From William J. Johnson, George Washington, *The Christian* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1919).



John Quincy Adams



“My hopes of a future life are all founded upon the Gospel of Christ and I cannot cavil or quibble away [evade or object to].... the whole tenor of His conduct by which He sometimes positively asserted and at others countenances [permits] His disciples in asserting that He was God.”

— John Quincy Adams, sixth President of the United States, diplomat, Secretary of State, U.S. senator, U.S. representative, “Old Man Eloquent,” “Hell-Hound of Abolition.”

John Adams and John Quincy Adams, *The Selected Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, Adrienne Koch and William Peden, editors (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), p. 292, John Quincy Adams to John Adams, January 3, 1817.

10; Ephesians 2:7) that **repentance** is produced by God’s sovereign grace: “*if perhaps God may grant ...*” (2 Timothy 2:25). In other words, like the faith to believe in Christ (e.g., Ephesians 2:8–9):

Repentance is also a gift from God! The person trapped in sin, desiring to change should therefore cry out in humility, “God, have mercy on me and grant me the gift of repentance from my sin!”

Repentance leads to lasting change; it is the key element in Progressive Sanctification! Underscoring this truth is Jeremiah 13:23. It states that any change apart from God-given **repentance** is futile:

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to doing evil.”

Sinners in and of themselves cannot change the essence of their very nature is Jeremiah’s point. Therefore, the only way a believer can achieve lasting change is with God’s help, which is why crying out to Him in brokenness and contrition is the only way to enact change for the better. If you are following me in the development of this study, “How to Effect Change and Growth in Your Life” has much to do with understanding exactly what biblical **repentance** is—in great detail—since that is pivotal to attaining growth, or sanctification, in the here and now.

D. THE RECURRING PAULINE SOUNDBITE DESCRIBING CHANGE

In Paul’s letters to the Roman, Ephesian, and Colossian churches he often speaks of spiritual growth, i.e., *sanctification* or “change” in terms of “putting off” and “putting on.” He is saying that to grow spiritually, the believer must put off the old self and put on the new self, which is best capsulized in Ephesians 4:22–24 wherein Paul states:

“That, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

Key to our study and relative to how the believer effectuates change in his life is the idea of “*laying aside the old self*,” or “putting it off.” And synonymous with “putting off” or “*laying aside*” is the Greek word for **repentance**. It means “to turn 180°,” to put something off or out of your life that is not pleasing to God.

It follows then that **repentance** or “putting off” is an essential, key element for Christian growth. Given basics related to sanctification and what leads to it, how can we best understand what is characteristic of true **repentance**? What follows may seem a bit “in the weeds” on this subject, but precisely and thoroughly understanding



what the Bible means by *repentance* is of utmost importance since it effectuates spiritual growth! It is the starting point of spiritual growth! Accordingly, to fail at understanding this point is to fail at growing spiritually.

What are the biblical indicators of repentance? What is the difference between human sorrow and true repentance?

Second Corinthians 7:9–11, which is perhaps the best passage in the New Testament that carefully delineates the characteristics of genuine *repentance*, reveals how to best understand that passage.

III. THE CONTEXT OF THE INSTRUCTION ON TRUE REPENTANCE

The following passage delineates, details, and defines the various components of true *repentance*:

“I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what

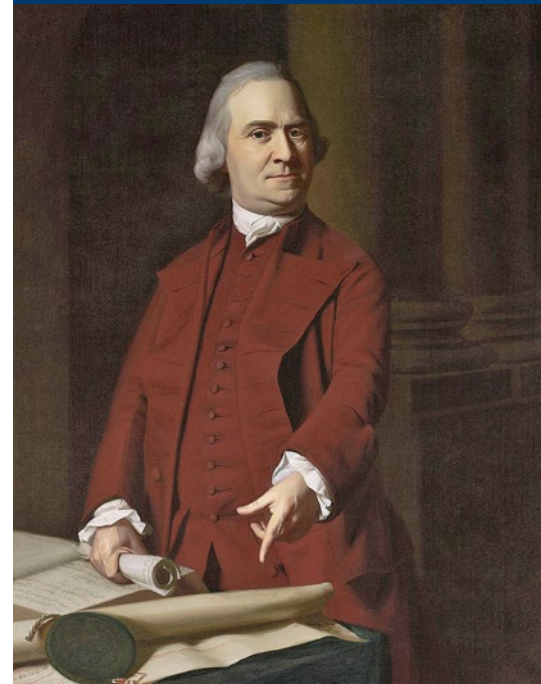
indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter” (2 Corinthians 7:9–11).

In this portion of the second book of Corinthians, Paul is tracing over the past relationship he has had with the body of believers in Corinth. In brief summary, during his second missionary journey, he spent 18 months personally establishing this church. Sometime after having planted this church, he sent his emissary, Timothy, to Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10, 11). As a result of that, Paul found out that self-styled false apostles now inhabited the assembly, and in their zeal for power, they had castigated Paul and had tried to persuade the congregation to no longer follow his teachings.

When he learned of this mutinous news, Paul immediately departed from Ephesus to visit Corinth. To his deep chagrin, upon his arrival he soon tasted of the bitter fruit of the false teachers, experiencing the *disloyalty* of so many in the flock—a flock he had labored so hard to establish. Accordingly, and reactively, upon his return to Ephesus, he authored what is now commonly referred to as the “Severe Letter” (ref. 2 Corinthians 2:4), sending it to Corinth via his beloved, loyal disciple Titus.

Upon their eventual reconnection, Titus gave a surprisingly warm report to Paul as to the Corinthian church’s acceptance of Paul’s “Severe Letter.” Specifically, many had *repented* of their

Samuel Adams



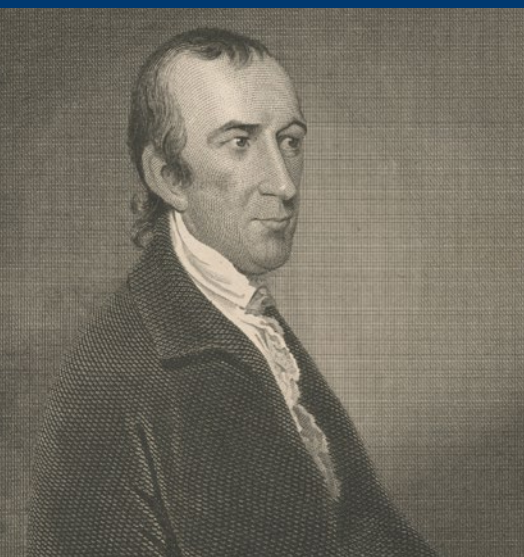
“If men of wisdom and knowledge, of moderation and temperance, of patience, fortitude and perseverance, of sobriety and true republican simplicity of manners, of zeal for the honour of the Supreme Being and the welfare of the commonwealth; if men possessed of these other excellent qualities are chosen to fill the seats of government, we may expect that our affairs will rest on a solid and permanent foundation.”

— Samuel Adams, signer of the Declaration of Independence, “Father of the American Revolution,” ratifier of the U.S. Constitution, Governor of Massachusetts.

Samuel Adams, letter to Elbridge Gerry, November 27, 1780.



Thomas Stone



“Shun all giddy, loose, and wicked company; they will corrupt and lead you into vice and bring you to ruin. Seek the company of sober, virtuous and good people . . . which will lead [you] to solid happiness.”

— Thomas Stone, signer of the Declaration of Independence, selected as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, lawyer, member of the committee that formed the Articles of Confederation in 1777, served as President of Congress in 1784.

John Sanderson, *Biography of the Signers to the Declaration of Independence* (Philadelphia: R. W. Pomeroy, 1824), Vol. IX, 333, Thomas Stone to his son, October 1787.

rebellion against the apostle! Paul was overjoyed to learn of this (as per the text under study herein in 2 Corinthians). In this broad context the words of 2 Corinthians chapter 7 need to be understood. As a result of the mutiny and the congregation’s later *repentance* from their disloyal behavior, the Holy Spirit is affording to all *what connotes true repentance in the life of a believer*. Again, perhaps no better passage in the entire Bible can be found than this one in 2 Corinthians 7:9–11 that unveils poignant insights all followers of Christ need to possess relative to the make-up of true *repentance*.

IV. EIGHT ASPECTS OF GENUINE REPENTANCE

True, genuine *repentance* and change, states Paul, is characterized by at least eight attitudes and related actions that are motivated by God’s sanctifying presence in the life of the believer.⁴ “Paul expands [on the matter of godly sorrow] into a whole series of acts or dispositions, all of which are inspired by that sorrow, according to God.”⁵ These characteristics follow from the words used by Paul in the 2 Corinthian passage.

A. EARNESTNESS (SPOUDE)

When a believer expresses *sorrow* in a godly manner, there will be a manifest sense of *earnestness* on his or her behalf to pursue a righteous course eagerly and assertively. There will be, as one commentator puts it, “speed involved in the carrying out of a matter...a willingness to do good will.”⁶ Herein is the

initial reaction of genuine *repentance* that is born from above.

The first earmark then, of genuine *repentance* is that godly sorrow, when present and given by God, will produce a sense of effort and urgency that is self-motivated from within.

There is a resolution that becomes a reality—an internal motivation, an *earnestness* to “bear fruit in keeping with *repentance*” (Matthew 3:8).

B. VINDICATION (APOLOGIA)

States the New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT) in regard to this specific characteristic of *vindication*:

“When they [the unrepentant Corinthian believers] thought of the infamy which sin had brought upon the church, they were quite eager to clear themselves of complicity in it and angry with themselves that they had ever allowed such a thing to be.”⁷

Here is the second mark of true *repentance*, as one commentator puts it: “A desire to clear one’s name of the stigma that accompanies sin, the *repentant* sinner restores the trust and confidence of others by making his genuine repentance known.”⁸ There exists an *earnestness* to outwardly rectify, i.e., to *vindicate* that which the sin caused. Conversely:



The falsely *repentant* are characterized by an attitude that remains stayed on self—far more concerned about damage to personal image than promptness to remedy.

This unrepentant person remains pre-occupied with himself and the ramifications to self that stem from his actions: his reputation and his standing among peers remains far more important. True *repentance* is always characterized by a God-given *desire* to immediately *vindicate* a *matter*, seeking out others whom they have offended, asking for their forgiveness, and thereby exonerate the wrong done. Put another way, to the genuinely *repentant*, outward self-preservation is less important than God-glorification. When an unction to *vindicate* is missing, a person is really not *repentant*.

C. INDIGNATION (*AGANAKTESIS*)

This same Greek word translated here into English as *indignation* is used elsewhere in several other gospel narratives and carries the idea of a person's being angered by his own wrongful actions. The Early Church father, Chrysostom, interpreted this portion of the passage to mean that the authentically *repentant* believer will be characterized by a personal *indignation* or anger "because of the scandal he had permitted to continue unchecked in the church and the consequent affront to the holy name of God." Herein is another clear indication of genuine *repentance*: the believer will possess an

internal hatred and anger over his sin and a discontentment relative to the *indignity* it has brought on the Lord's name and His church.

In actuality, this self-*indignation* is a blessing from God that can be likened to the internal molten pressure found in a volcano. An authentic self-hatred will brew inside the believer's heart—a self-hatred that can only find its release through total rectification with offended parties.

D. FEAR (*PHOBOS*)

In addition to their internal compunction, the wayward Corinthian believers *feared* the apostolic authority of the one to whom they had been disloyal. They *feared* that he could seek retribution for their sinful ways, in fact, "*with a rod*" (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:21). A manifest characteristic of true *repentance* means there will not only be a healthy *fear* of God but of those the sin has wronged.

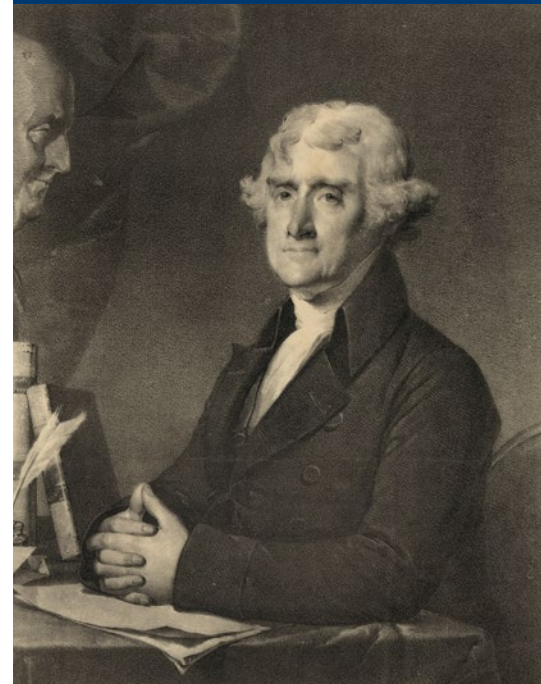
To summarize the first four points:

The genuinely *repentant* are those who possess an earnestness to vindicate themselves with an offended party. This motivation stems from self-*indignation* and also present is fear of the retributive judgment of a holy and righteous God.

E. LONGING (*ZELOS*)

Zelos is the Greek word from which we derive the English word "jealousy." At

Thomas Jefferson



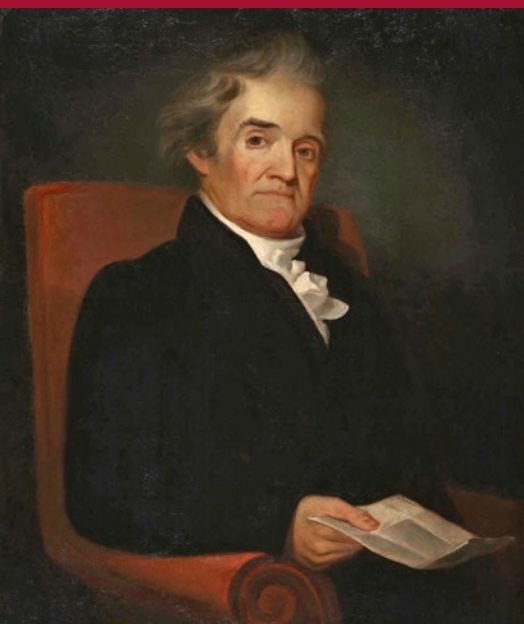
"The practice of morality being necessary for the wellbeing of society, He [God] has taken care to impress its precepts so indelibly on our hearts that they shall not be effaced by the subtleties of our brain. We all agree in the obligation of the moral principles of Jesus and nowhere will they be found delivered in greater purity than in His discourses."

— Thomas Jefferson, signer of the Declaration of Independence, diplomat; Governor of Virginia, Secretary of State, third President of the United States.

Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Albert Ellery Bergh, editor (Washington D.C.: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1904), Vol. XII, 315, to James Fishback, September 27, 1809.



Noah Webster



“The virtues of men are of more consequence to society than their abilities; and for this reason, the heart should be cultivated with more assiduity than the head.”

— Noah Webster, Revolutionary War soldier, judge, legislator, educator, “Schoolmaster to America.”

Noah Webster, *On the Education of Youth in America*, 1788.



its root, it means “a strong *desire*.” In the context of this passage, it means “a *yearning*” or “a strong *desire* to restore a relationship with someone who has been sinned against. Akin to No. 2 (the *vindication* of self which has in mind the forensic, outward detail given to clearing up the *matter* and situation), the *longing* mentioned here relates more to a vehement *desire* stemming from an internal aspiration of the heart.⁹ The Corinthian believers, in their genuine *repentance*, manifested an internal *zeal* to honor Paul and his apostolic authority. In addition, they strongly *desired* to repudiate the false intruders in the church. More deeply, they possessed a *yearning* to follow Paul’s example—one of wholehearted devotion to the cause of Christ.

All of these attitudes express a motivated-by-God compunction to do the right thing. Why? John Murray states, “[True] regeneration is the renewing of the heart and mind, and the renewed heart and mind must act according to their nature.”¹⁰ The genuinely *repentant* will always *yearn* and *long* for right relationships with other people. In Romans 12:18 Paul summarily embodies the aforementioned characteristics when he states, “*If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.*”

F. ZEAL (EPIPOTHESIS)

Another attitude that is consistent with true *repentance* is the *zeal* that the Corinthian believers possessed to take up Paul’s defense and stand against the false teachers who had taken over the Corinthian Church. States NICNT,

[the Corinthian believers *desired*] “to see the restoration of their former relationship of trust and affection.”¹¹ Their response to Paul’s “Severe Letter” was not one of anger, but one of soberness, acceptance and the realization that they had been disloyal to the apostle. They adopted Paul’s view toward the false teachers, taking up Paul’s cause as their own! God-enabled genuine *repentance* produces this kind of *zeal* to do an about-face on a *matter*. They possessed *zeal* to reaffirm their love and allegiance for him. To the contrary, people who are unrepentant or humanly *sorrowful* in a selfish way will remain disloyal and avoid adopting the contrary opinion regarding an offense. They are characterized by not admitting to any wrongdoing and continue to blame the other party.

G. AVENGING OF WRONG (EKDIKESIS)

Perhaps the strongest indication of true *repentance* is the one that is hardest to perform by means other than God-given. In God-empowered *repentance*, the sinner thinks not of protecting himself or herself. The overriding concern is for justice to be done. States one commentator, “he wants to see the sin avenged no matter what it might cost him.”¹² Whether or not Paul was referring in our home passage to the Corinthians’ *avenging of the wrong* relative to their interpersonal relationship, or the Corinthians’ *avenging of wrong* in having allowed the false apostles to lead in the church does not matter relative to this study. In both cases, the now-humble Corinthian believers had a *desire* to seek reconciliation! The



all-consuming objective was to put their house in order—no matter what the cost. When this is the believer’s attitude, then spiritual growth is in view:

Such an attitude is indicative of an earnest desire never to do that again—and therein is spiritual growth; progressive sanctification is achieved.

H. INNOCENT IN THE MATTER (*HAGNOS*)

The last characterizing word that Paul chooses under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to choose what typifies true *repentance* is the Corinthians’ *innocence* relative to their past sin. The Greek word here for *innocent* means “clear” or “pure, holy.” He chose this word because the connotation of it has to do with a ritual purity. Without going into greater details or illustrations of early word usage, the idea carried here is that if a procedure is followed, then purity results. And that is exactly why Paul chooses this word last on his list of identifying characteristics. Paul’s word choice displays a beautiful, human illustration of the theology behind 1 John 1:9, which states:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

In Paul’s mind, the Corinthian believers were now *innocent of the matter* because they had *confessed* and *repented* of their sin as was more than evident by the seven previous new attitudes and actions indicated in and by

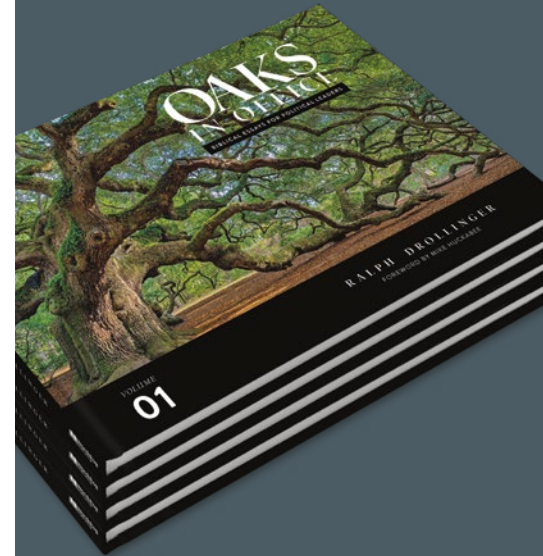
this insightful passage. Important also to note is that Paul doesn’t rehearse the sin here; he simply calls it *the matter*. Why? In that they had satisfactorily taken care of their sin as evidenced by their actions of *godly sorrow*, in Paul’s mind, the past had been made “*as white as snow*” (Isaiah 1:18) because they had borne “*fruit in keeping with repentance*” (Matthew 3:8). In Philipians we learn that Paul practiced *forgetting what lies behind* (Philippians 3:13). Since the past had been made right, it was time to move on—not relive it. Paul is expressing an attitude of exhilaration over the completion of *the matter*. This passage then is a beautiful narrative of the achievement of spiritual growth:

Indicative of real spiritual growth is this: Dehabituation and rehabilitation have been achieved.

V. SUMMARY

These eight characteristics of genuine *repentance* are basic to spiritual growth—correctly and completely turning away from the past and moving toward what is right in the future. Putting off and putting on is a dehabituation and a rehabilitation.

A worldly kind of self-centered *sorrow* over sin will manifest few if any of these attitudes characteristic of true, genuine *repentance*. Furthermore, such a response to sin—holding on to it—is stagnating to a believer’s spiritual growth. Remember the Greek word for repentance means “a change of



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mind” whereas *lupe*, the Greek word for *worldly sorrow*, means, “pain of body.”

Repentance is the fundamental key to a life of change and growth. As such, a believer matures in his Christian life through genuine *repentance*. So then, as God places things on your heart that need to change, pay close attention! Turn from them in *earnestness* and put them behind you forever as you put off and put on and move on toward sanctification in Christ! Amen!

1. Second Corinthians 5:17 states, “*Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*”
2. Since salvation is explicitly revealed in Scripture to be a gift to those who will by faith repent and receive Jesus Christ as Lord.
3. Note that the term Nouthetic Counseling comes from this reference. This form of pastoral counseling is totally Bible based and focused solely on Christ, renouncing conventional psychology and psychiatry as humanistic because so often they are opposed to biblical principles.
4. As stated, repentance is actually a gift from God, given along with the ability to believe in Christ, at the day of one’s salvation. Importantly and additionally, this gift of repentance is ongoing in its operation—not only in salvation, but in sanctification (throughout the life of the believer) as inferred by the apostle in this passage under study.
5. James Denney, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Vol. 38, *The Expositor’s Bible* (New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1894), 256.
6. Moisés Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* [NIDONTT] (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2014).
7. Denney, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Vol. 38, 256.
8. John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2006), 1743.
9. Whenever Paul spoke of a good desire in the NT (as he does 13 times), he uses this Greek word that is translated as “longing.” (Conversely, when he speaks of a wrong, lustful desire he uses *epithymia*.)
10. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 106.
11. Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* [NIDONTT].
12. MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*, 1773.

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