

# A Review of What Scripture Says About “Repentance” Both in the Old and the New Testaments

[1974]

by John E. Raabe

It is Sunday morning. The service has begun. As the congregation sings the second hymn, the pastor takes his Bible and enters the pulpit. He has prepared his sermon well and is eager to preach it to his congregation. He opens his Bible to the text, bows his head in prayer, and then faces the congregation. And—he is appalled by the sight that meets his eyes. In the front row he sees the Pharisee, who has said, “I thank Thee that I am not as other men are.” In the rear pew is the publican, who looks down and cannot face the pastor. He beholds the twelve apostles, one denied his Lord, another betrayed Him, and all forsook Him and fled. Here is Lazarus, who has just been raised from the dead. Next to him is Martha, the president of the Ladies Aid, is very active, but often “cumbered about much serving.” There is Mary, who never misses a service or Bible Class. Way back the woman of Samaria appears. She doesn’t know whether she is welcome, but she has found her Savior and wants to hear more. And—there is Caiaphas, the high priest, together with the Sanhedrin. They want to determine whether anything will be said to embarrass them. And in the rear is the governor and his wife. He did not want to come, but his wife insisted, for she had a bad dream the night before. These and all the other people whom Jesus faced are in the audience, as well as the entire congregation.

Now, what should the pastor do? His first thought is to leave the pulpit and get away as fast as possible. He cannot, as the quarterbacks do, call an audible at the line of scrimmage and come up with the sermon that will please everyone. And then, the pastor remembers his ordination vow, that he will proclaim the “whole counsel of God.” His sermon, if it is worth anything at all, will have the one message that God has for all men, “Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” Every sermon, no matter what the text, or the theme, must bring Law and Gospel, must preach Sin and Grace, must preach “Repentance,” This is the message brought us in the Old and the New Testaments.

## 1. Etymology of the word “repentance”

The *English* word, “repent” is defined as regret, penitence, contrition, compunction, to change ones mind or heart. The *German* word “*Buße*” is related to the word “*besser*,” thus refers to a betterment. It is also defined as “*Genugtuung*,” satisfaction, and it seems to emphasize the thought that man can cooperate in repentance. The *Latin* term is “*poenitentia*,” from “*punire*”—to inflict pain and punishment. The word, like the English word, lays too much stress on the negative. In the *Greek* μεταμέλομαι appears a few times. It means “it is a care to one afterward, it repents one, usually reflexive. (Matt. 27:3; 21:29, 32; Heb, 7:21.) Another word used is ἐπιστρέφω, to turn to, to turn one’s self about, turn back or around. (I Peter 2:25; John 12:40). However the word that is used most often is μετανοέω, μετανοία. It means to change ones mind or heart. The original meaning was “to perceive or see afterward,” i.e. when it is too late, thus to regret. It looks back to the regretted sin and forward to the accepted pardon.

The *Hebrew* נחם is very interesting. Its original meaning was to sigh deeply, with the thought of deep agony in the soul. The soul groans because of the heavy load, and thus is translated “repent.” Job 42:6 “I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.” Ezek. 14:6 “Thus

saith the Lord God, Repent and turn yourselves from your idols.” The word נָחַם seems to be an onomatopoeic word, that is, even the sound of the word indicates that something deep and serious is occurring. But this same word also means “to comfort one’s self, to be comforted, as in the case of death. (Gen. 37:35; 38:12). Thus it refers to the deep feeling of compassion when you see someone else suffering, and then the words of comfort to help. (Ps. 23:4 “Thy rod and thy staff, they *comfort* me”). This word beautifully relates what repentance is, first the deep sorrow over sins, then the powerful comfort of the Gospel, which effects the total change of heart.

## 2. The word “repentance” as it is used in the Old and New Testaments

The study of Gods Word consists to a great extent in the *meaning* of the words as they are used *in their context*. The word “Law” may refer to the entire Bible, including the Gospel; or the word in the narrow sense means the Law as distinguished from the Gospel. The word “Gospel” also is used in the wide and narrow senses. So it is with “repent” and “repentance.”

It is surprising to note how often this word is used of God, “God repents” (ca. 20 times). Gen. 6:6: “It repented the Lord that He had made man.” Here of course is a figure of speech, called *anthropomorphism*. God is often pictured in the Bible as though He had eyes, ears, hands, etc., also as though He had human emotions. This is done to make Him more intelligible to us. On the other hand “God is not a man that He should repent,” I Sam. 15:29, He does not really change His mind for He knows all things. At times it may mean an outward change of mind, Ex. 13:17: “Lest the people repent when they see war.” In Matt. 27:3 the repentance of Judas is mentioned, but here it is mere worldly sorrow, not a godly repentance. He repented of the consequences not of the sin itself. In Luke 10:13, “Tyre and Sidon would have repented” must mean an outward change. The “works of power” cannot work a true repentance, but they would have at least desisted from the gross sins, outwardly.

The meaning that we are interested in is a *change of heart*. The word is used in the *wide* and in the *narrow* sense. In the *wide* sense it signifies conversion viewed in its entirety, embracing contrition and faith. Thus Acts 2:38: “Repent and be baptized everyone of you.” (Also Luke 3:3; 13:5; 15:7). In the *narrow* sense it refers to contrition alone, Mark 1:15: “Repent and believe the Gospel.” (Also Acts 20:21; Luke 24:46-47). It is also used in the *narrow* sense in our Catechism, Question No. 359 “The Old Adam is to be drowned by daily contrition and repentance,” and in No. 361 repentance is defined as “faith in the forgiveness of sins.”

We shall confine ourselves to the use in the *wide* sense in this paper as it is listed in the Augsburg Confession XII, “Of Repentance”. “Repentance consists properly of these two parts: one is *contrition*, that is, terror’s smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin; the other is *faith*, which is born of the Gospel, or of absolution, and believes that, for Christ’s sake, sins are forgiven, comforts the conscience and delivers it from terrors.”

## 3. The Difference between Conversion and Repentance

Both conversion and repentance refer to the identical miracle which God alone performs, a sinner becomes a saint, but there are some differences. The Hebrew word for convert is שׁוּב – to turn, return, bring back. (IS. 59:20 “converted”). Occasionally both – שׁוּב and נָחַם are employed, Ex. 32:12; “Turn from Thy fierce wrath and repent of this evil against Thy people.” Also, Jer. 31:19: “After that I was turned, I repented.”

Conversion is usually *passive*, someone is converted, repentance is active, “Repent ye.” “Conversion brings *picture language*, a person is turned around. This is true also of the synonym

for conversion: regeneration—being born again, enlightenment and illumination—light is turned on contrasted to the former total darkness, quickening—someone was “dead” but is now alive. Repentance is *literal*. Also, conversion tells us *what happened*. Repentance informs us *how it happened*. Conversion also is *instantaneous*, although it can be repeated if someone falls from faith, iterative conversion. The first repentance also is instantaneous, and can also be repeated if someone loses his faith, but daily repentance in the child of God, may and should *continue* to the moment of death. Conversion also may *include the sanctified life* which follows and thus it exceeds repentance. Repentance does not include the results, but the fruits do follow. Conversion and convert, also convert are of course also used in the sense of joining another denomination...a person received via adult confirmation.

#### **4. Repentance in Infants and Adults**

In the Lutheran Church as well as in all other Christian churches which have infant baptisms, the vast majority of members have come to repentance while they were infants, thus were not aware of the tremendous blessing bestowed upon it. From Scripture we know and believe that children are born sinful, they are included in the command to baptize all nations, they can believe. We follow the OT command to circumcise the boys when they were one week old. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” “Baptism doth also now save us.” When a child is baptized, this however is *not magic*, it is not done “*ex opere operato*,” through the mere act. But children come to faith just as adults do. The law smites them and the Gospel creates faith in their hearts. For this reason from early years the Christians have used the identical form for infant and adult baptisms, directing questions to those to be baptized. In adults however *knowledge* is absolutely essential in repentance, knowledge of sins, knowledge of the Savior, that is, faith. Thanks be to God that He has made it easier for children to come to faith, for we are to become and remain as little children, but *how* this occurs we of course do not know. We leave that to our gracious Lord. In this essay we are speaking about repentance in those who have attained the age of discretion.

#### **5. The Means used to effect Repentance**

Our Lord directs us to use *His Word*. But, what do we mean by “The Word of God?” “There are those who are of the opinion that the Holy Spirit operates only through the original languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. If this were true there would be no comfort to the millions who cannot understand those languages. It is true that the unique operation of *inspiration* was confined to the 36 (ca.) writers and the 66 books of Scripture. That happened in that sense only then. But, already at the time of Christ the *Septuagint* had appeared, the Greek translation of the OT. Quotations from the LXX appear in the NT and are the Word of God, because and insofar as they correctly bring God’s message. And, when Jesus and the apostles quote the OT they do not always do it verbatim, but they do give the sense of the original. *Whatever therefore is based on the Word of God is His Word*, our sermons hymns, the lessons taught by the Christian teachers. A pastor could preach a fine sermon and not once quote a Bible verse, and still preach the Word of God.

It is important to *know the circumstances* of the people before us. This will decide what should be said. When Jesus confronts Pilate, He does not quote the OT Scriptures, which Pilate did not know but He appealed *to his natural conscience and to his God-consciousness*. So Paul in Lystra referred to the “abomination of idolatry,” Acts 14:17, then spoke about the living God.

So in Athens he spoke of the folly of idolatry, that God made all things, then came the Gospel. When Paul addressed Jews, he used the threatenings of Isaiah, in Acts 28:25.

The two doctrines that are to be used in repentance are the *Law* and the *Gospel*. We must remember that every man has an *Old Adam*. This sinful part of every man is corrupt, totally corrupt. Even in the finest Christian there still is this Old Adam, and that is of the devil. This Old Adam cannot be reformed, or educated. You can not do business with him. Even in a very moral man like Nicodemus, the old man rules. The Old Adam must be drowned, must be crucified. The law alone can do this and thus is preparatory. It brings men to despair. (When we are asked why the devil did not get a second chance, as Adam and Eve did, we reply because the devil originated sin. He is the liar and the father of lies. He is sin, and no change is possible in him. He is confirmed in sin, unbelief, and everything evil. Therefore Jesus came, not to do business with the devil, but to “destroy” him, to defeat him completely.) This must also be done with the Old Adam in every person before a true repentance can be effected.

The Lord preached the Law to *Adam and Eve* after the fall into sin. “What is this that thou hast done?” The Lord proclaimed the Law to Cain when He saw murder in his heart. “Why art thou wroth?” Gen. 4:6. Also after the murder, “What hast thou done?” Gen. 4:10. Nathan preached the Law to *David*, who after the sins of adultery and murder remained impenitent for a year. The parable of the pet lamb, killed by the neighbor was law and then, “Thou art the man!” Jesus preached the Law too. With Him it was an *alien work*, the Gospel was His real forte, but the Law had to do preliminary work before the Gospel would be effective. So to Nicodemus, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” John 3:3. So also to the woman of Samaria and revealed her life of sin.

*Peter* on Pentecost Sunday had to thoroughly convince his hearers that they had committed the most heinous crime in history by murdering Jesus of Nazareth, so they might be “pricked in their hearts,” Acts 2. And when Jesus came down from heaven to appear to *Saul of Tarsus*, the Lord had to completely crush this man, who was thoroughly indoctrinated in the Pharisaic philosophy, who was self-righteous, and who was convinced he was doing God a service by persecuting the Christians. Jesus’ words indicate not one shred of Gospel. It was Law. When Ananias three days later spoke to Saul, there was no vestige of Law anymore. Now the Gospel was the whole answer.

This is the first part of repentance, or rather, the preliminary work. There is to be a *resolute opposition to sin*, This is the *negative aspect*, but it is essential. So to Simon the Sorcerer, Acts 8, “Thou art in the bond of iniquity.” His heart was not right in the sight of God, v.21. A complete change is necessary. He must desist from evil thoughts and lusts of the heart. Similarly, Rev. 2:21, the church at Thyatira is admonished to “repent of her fornication,” also Heb., 6:1 “repentance from dead works.”

Now the *positive*. In repentance a sinner abandons the sinful thoughts, lusts, desires of his heart. But his heart is not to remain empty. Now the *Gospel* is needed. In Acts 20:21 Paul speaks of “repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus preached the Gospel to Nicodemus after the Law had done its work. John 3:16. So Peter on Pentecost, “Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” To the jailer in Philippi, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,” Acts 16:31. Nathan to David, “The Lord hath put away thy sin. Thou shalt not die.” 2 Sam. 12:13.

It is not always necessary to follow this regular order and preach the Law first and then the Gospel. In some cases *the Law has already done its work*. Speaking to the women taken in adultery, Jesus notes she already is smitten. He now preached the Gospel alone, “Neither do I

condemn thee”, but He encourages her to a life of good works, “Go, and sin no more!” So also to Zacchaeus, Luke 19.

## **6. Still the God of Love even when He proclaims the Law**

The Christian child should always remember when he is being punished by his parents, that his parents do this in love. They are concerned about the child’s future welfare. Our heavenly Father also must proclaim the Law, because He is the righteous God, but we have learned to know what is in His heart...abounding Love for all mankind.

When the people worshipped the *golden calf* and the Lord said; “Let Me alone, that My wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them,” Ex, 32;10, Moses showed that He knew God’s love and he pleaded, “Turn from Thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against Thy people.” God gave *Jonah* a message of Law for Nineveh, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown,” 3:4. Jonah, the unwilling prophet, confessed, “I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of evil.” This message was a prophecy of the Lord. It was God’s Word, but in this case it was a conditional prophecy. God left an opening, and Jonah realized it, although he did not favor it. The people of Nineveh also felt it, “Who can tell if God will turn and repent and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?” 3:9.

Hezekiah, 2 Kings 20...also a conditional prophecy. Abraham pleaded with God regarding Sodom, Gen. 18. Jesus preached the Law to the Syrophenician woman, He seemingly ignored her, practically called her a dog, but how happy He was when she passed the test of faith. “Behind a frowning Providence He hides a smiling face.”

## **7. The Difference between Godly and Worldly Sorrow**

Sorrow over sin is the response and reaction of the heart to the voice of the Law, but there is a difference in men. *Godly sorrow* can occur in Christians only and is part of the daily sanctification. It is not motivated by fear of punishment but by love to God. They are sorry to have grieved God by their sins.

The *sorrow of the world* is wrought by the Law. It springs from the wrath and punishment of God. So Judas, Cain. The rich young man went away sorrowful.

## **8. Why does God ask us to repent when we cannot do this in our own power?**

The Lord speaks to everyone *personally*...You “repent, believe, come.” He pleads, “My son, *give* Me thine heart.” The power of course is in the Word of God. In the invitation the *Word supplies the power*, to repent and believe. Jesus spoke to the deaf ear, “Be opened!” and it was opened. Jesus addressed the corpse of Lazarus, “Arise!” Lazarus had no power to respond, but he did arise. God’s Word alone has creative power.

## **9. The Difference between the first and daily repentance**

When a man has repented he has completely shifted his position. He may still be troubled by his flesh, his faith is not always as strong as it might be, but in principle he condemns his flesh, and in principle he submits to the Kingdom of God. What he now needs is not repentance again, now he needs perseverance and growth in his new life, in other words, *sanctification*. One aspect of this is *daily repentance*. In his first thesis Luther stated, “Christ wished the entire life of believers to be repentance.” Essentially the first repentance and the daily repentance are identical. Both consist of contrition and faith. Repentance may be called a “new birth.” Now

after we have repented, we are to grow, just as we did physically in our youth. The penitent has forgiveness of sins, he has eternal life. But he is to remain on earth for a while longer. There will be constant dangers. There will be tasks to perform. Our knowledge, our emotional life, our will must be strengthened. There is the constant danger of relaxing our efforts, there is the possibility of falling in false spiritual security. We are bombarded with many evils which surround us, i.e. today's permissiveness.

Our Old Adam is entirely evil and needs only the Law. The New Man is perfect and needs not the Law, only the Gospel. But we are a *dual nature*, and the New Man predominates. Daily we drown the Old Adam. Now we need a combination of the Law and the Gospel, or *evangelical admonition*.

To help us in our daily repentance our Lord urges us to *hear God's Word*, to *be baptized*, to *receive the Lord's Supper*. He asks us to "*Watch*". Only Christians are addressed so. At times He lays a "*Cross*" upon us. This is not pleasant but it helps us in our walk to life eternal. Three times He asked Peter, "Lovest thou Me?" This pained Peter and Jesus wanted that to happen, but only as a means to the end, to help him for the future. In 2 Cor., 7:10 Paul speaks about *godly sorrow*. Paul had to speak sharply to them, it had hurt their feelings, but Paul states, "I write not these things to shame you," 1 Cor. 4:14. This godly sorrow "worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of", a repentance which one will never regret and which gives rise to real joy, v.9.

Our Lord also asks us to practice *self-denial*. This will help to subject our Old Adam. When we for instance read the Sermon on the Mount this helps and assists the Christian in a deeper understanding of the Law and aids us in meeting the countless devices of the devil.

Now having repented we are encouraged to bring forth more *fruits of repentance*. We are to produce them, and having the Holy Spirit in our hearts gives us the power to do them. God produces them in and through us.

He encourages us to a life of *prayer*, talking things over with our Lord, confessing our sins, thanking Him, praising Him. Other helps which our Lord gives and which He wants us to use in our daily repentance and life are *joint prayer*, joining and working in the *church* (and the *Synod*), so that His name may be proclaimed throughout the world. He gives the evangelical admonition to *avoid* those who teach contrary to God's Word and persist in it. There is *brotherly admonition*, etc.

Thus it is a combination of the Law and the Gospel which are needed for our daily repentance.

## **10. Not Mechanical, not Conditional**

Occasionally it happens when a Christian dies suddenly, that the bereaved bemoan the fact that he did not have time to call the pastor, to receive Holy Communion, nor to ask God to forgive him before he passed away. The Lord does remind us that "*Today*" is the Day of Salvation. We should all be ready at all times for His final call. The Lord does say: "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,*" 1 John 1:9 *but* our relationship with our Lord is not mechanical, not conditional. We live in the sunshine of God's grace, the just lives by faith, we have forgiveness and eternal life, not only continually but continuously.

## **11. Repentance Defined**

True repentance is a complete *change of heart* in which the person regrets his former total sinfulness and through faith embraces the grace of God. Thus it has a *double aspect*, a deep

remorse over former sins (contrition) but the principal element is faith. He now rejects his sinful flesh with every ounce of energy and turns to the Kingdom of God. It is a change of the innermost self, a new mind, a new heart, a new spirit. This is a miracle wrought by God alone through His holy and powerful Word.

Like conversion repentance is *an instantaneous act*, although we may not always be able to point to the exact moment it happened. There is *no middle ground*. A man is either converted or not. Either he is repentant or impenitent. We reject the term “noble souls”, as though some by nature are closer to God than others. We reject the concept of “attrition”, one who is half-converted. We reject the distinction made by some between being “awakened” and “converted”. (Herod, Festus, Felix, Agrippa, etc.).

Repentance in adults always involves *knowledge*, not merely as intellectual knowledge but a spiritual knowledge. Through the power of the Holy Spirit it affects one personally, creates and maintains in the heart an affirmative response. This spiritual knowledge is *faith*, and though at times it is weak and small, it is *saving faith*.

Repentance is always followed by *fruits*. This is not part of repentance but is the result, the effect. They may be many or few, large or small, but fruits always follow. No repentant person needs to be encouraged to bring forth fruits, but we all need the encouragement daily to *grow* in them.

## **12. It is possible to lose our faith**

*Two vicious doctrines* which Satan has proclaimed is first of all that man *can never be sure of his salvation*. He wants us to doubt. The Roman Catholic Church has used this to keep a strong hold on its people. Our Lord wants us to be sure. We are to “know,” to “be persuaded.” The second falsehood is this that man who has once come to faith, *cannot fall away again*. Our Lord tells us the truth in the Bible, and we note sadly that there were many instances of people falling from faith, some for a while, others until the end. This happened even in the finest of families—Cain, Absalom, David, Solomon, Peter, Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, Demas, etc. Some reasons why people lose faith are 1) Neglect of the means of grace, 2) self-righteousness, rationalistic pride, 2 Cor. 10:5, 1 Tim. 6:20-21; 3) love of the world, 1 John 2:15, 2 Peter 2:20-21; 4) willful sins against the conscience. The penitence of David and Peter are a tremendous comfort for the children of God, for they returned unto the Lord.

## **13. Some Dangers that must be avoided**

A. The thought that man can in any way cooperate in his conversion or repentance, thus synergism, Pelagianism, Semi-pelagianism.

B. Do not afflict those who already are afflicted through the Law. The Law has made them thirsty, do not deny them the Water of Life.

C. Do not preach the Gospel to those who are still unconverted, and have not become contrite. This will make them worse hypocrites.

D. Don't in your sermons give the congregation the impression they are all murderers, thieves, adulterers.

E. Don't give the impression that we are all like Abraham with a model faith, have the patience of Job, the love of John, the zeal of Paul.

F. The predominance of Law preaching. The preaching of the Law is necessary, also for Christians, as a mirror, as a curb for our sinful flesh, as a guide, but like Jesus, when we proclaim the Law, this is a *foreign and alien work*. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

G. We must avoid the thought that putting away a few vices is repentance. The Reformed use the expression, "Repentance is to stop doing what you have been doing." This can be understood correctly, but more is involved.

H. We dare not expect every person to experience the same amount of anguish in contrition. People are different. Circumstances are not always the same. Not everyone has done what David did, adultery and murder, nor do we all have the same temperament.

I. We cannot determine in every case the exact moment when one is converted or has the first repentance.

#### **14. Why is there no repentance for those who have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost?**

Jesus died for the sins of all people, who have ever lived or will live on earth. He paid for all sins. He became "sin" for all. "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound." Grace is far stronger than any and every sin. But in Matthew 12:32 we read; "Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come."

What makes this sin so different? Certainly it is not the magnitude of the sin that makes it unforgivable. Jesus forgave murderers, persecutors, thieves, adulterers, and every type of sinner.

This sin is unbelief, but the worst form of unbelief. Every unbeliever commits *a* sin against the Holy Ghost, but not necessarily *the* sin. First of all it consists in blasphemy, *speaking* against the Holy Ghost, against the office of the Holy Ghost. It is the office of the Holy Ghost to call men to and keep them in repentance. A man who commits this sin *knows* that God's Word is the truth, but in spite of that, hates it and speaks openly against it. The man puts himself into that position. When this reaches a certain degree, God ceases to operate in him. Thus it is *the nature of the sin* that condemns, he rejects the only means that is able to save him. *And we can say of no person that he has committed this sin before his death.* I John 5:16 "There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it." God alone knows who has committed this sin.

When a person *worries* about whether he is committing this sin that is proof that he has not committed it. If anyone has even a spark of yearning for mercy, that man is a believer. However the question has been asked, "Should we tell a man that just because he is worrying about it, that this is proof that he has not committed it?" When we attended the Seminary we were asked to write an answer to this by Prof. John Meyer. The answer he wanted was "No," because this might tend to make him trust in his own feelings and emotions. Rather, said Prof. Meyer, preach the Gospel to him.

However a former president of the WELS, Pastor G. E. Bergemann, disagreed and stated that he could be told that his worrying was evidence that he had not committed this sin, but at the same time remind the person to put his trust in the Gospel alone, and he also could be told of the nature of this sin. I am inclined to agree with Pastor Bergemann.

#### **15. The Approach to the Impenitent**

The study of repentance is not complete until we learn how to "break the ice", how to penetrate the hard shell of the impenitent. Our Lord, the Master Teacher, gives us some tremendous examples how to succeed in reaching the hearts and consciences of people. The Bible nowhere states that all who hear God's Word will repent, but it makes it very plain that God's Word never fails. It is either unto life or unto death. In our Evangelism programs, canvassing, follow-ups, counseling, etc. let us permit Jesus to lead us in some vital hints how to approach people.



**A. Ask Questions.** So God came to Adam and Eve who had sinned, “Did you eat?” So to Cain before and after he killed his brother, Jesus asked many questions, about 100 are listed in the Gospels. “The Baptism of John, whence was it?” “And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out?” Some times they refused to answer but they could not escape the power of the Word. So we ask, “If you would die now would you go to heaven?” “And what is your hope of gaining heaven?” We note sadly that the devil knows this too and asked Eve, “Did God really say...?”

**B. He answered Questions.** Perhaps at times we wonder why He said this or that. Why did he not say “Yes” or “No”? but He knew what he was doing. Note how He answered the question regarding the greatest commandment, or whether to pay tribute to Caesar or not. For us a knowledge of Scriptures is of course paramount. (At times Jesus refused to answer and His silence spoke loudly. He would not cast pearls before swine.)

**C. He used pictures language, figurative language, parables (60).** A story or an illustration is often the only way to get a person’s attention. Nathan must have spent restless nights trying to find some way to reach the heart of unrepentant David. Finally he told the story of the pet lamb, and this did the job, “Thou art the man!”

The parables were masterpieces. At times He made use of *apperception*, proceeding from the known to the unknown, from concrete to abstract...from water to “living water”, from manna and bread to the “Bread of Life.” He also utilized the “*demonstratio ad oculos*” when the disciples argued about who was the greatest, he placed a child into their midst, “Become like a little child.”

**D. Induction.** This is the most common way to arrive at a conclusion. This proceeds from specific cases to a general statement. Jesus would have had no success with the woman of Samaria without it. He asked for a drink of water, revealed her past life, spoke of living water, aroused the question in her whether He was greater than Jacob who dug this well, told her about true worship, then “I am the Messiah.” So the disciples of John the Baptist, to the Emmaus’ disciples. (So we also arrive at some doctrines, Trinity, that Christ is the Messiah, that the Pope is the Antichrist, Infant Baptism).

**E. Deduction.** You start with a general statement and then to specific judgments. The “I AM’s” result in various judgments. In John 15:20 “The servant is no greater than his Master”...so you too will be persecuted. Gal. 6:7 “Whatsoever a man soweth so shall he reap.” (By deduction we derive some of our teachings...the divine nature of the call, the requirement that the vote for a pastor be unanimous, the idolatrous nature of the lodge, that women should not preach, nor have the right to vote in church).

**F. Logical Dilemma, *Tertium no datur*, either-or.** This is a powerful approach to people. “Either you’re going to heaven or to hell.” Our treasures are either on earth or in heaven. We are saved either by faith or by works. We either serve God or Mammon, one or the other, not both.

Here we must be careful that it really is a dilemma. When the disciples asked Jesus in regard to the blind man, they asked whether his parents had caused this through their sins, or was it caused by some sin of the blind man. Jesus replied, “Neither.” And when the enemies asked Jesus whether it was right to pay taxes to Caesar or not, they thought they had Him, but He answered, “Give to both, the government and the church.”

**G. *A fortiori*.** (“with greater force”) We often need to make comparisons, sometimes from the greater to the lesser, then from the lesser to the greater. If God clothes the lilies so beautifully, how much more will He take care of you. If we being evil give good gifts how much

more will our Heavenly Father. When the enemies assailed Him for healing on the Sabbath Day, He asked them that if they would draw an ox or ass out of a pit on the Sabbath, would it not be much more important to heal a man who is in deep trouble? (*a majori*—Luke 12:23; John 7:23; John 13:14; 1 Cor. 6:3, 9:11. *a minori*—Luke 15:3-4; John 7:23; 1 Cor. 6:7; Luke 11:8; 11:11) “If you consider sleep so important Sunday mornings, is it not more important to find rest for your soul?”

**H. *Reductio ad absurdum.*** In Mark 9:43ff Jesus speaks of a man with a diseased hand, foot, eye, and then “cut it off,” “pluck it out”. This finally reaches absurdity, there will soon be nothing left. There is a better way, use medicine to cure the diseased member before it goes too far. So above all spiritually.

The Sadducees felt they were using a *reductio ad absurdum* when they spoke of the woman with seven husbands, all brothers. Jesus exploded this when He said, “You do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.”

**I. *Argumentum ad hominem.*** A very interesting logical argument and one used by the Lord quite often. In fact, these situations often cause us to wonder why Jesus spoke as He did, until we realize that He is using this argument. He uses their thinking, accepts for a moment what they believe, then proves that they are wrong. Matt. 9:12. “Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?” He answered them from their own premises. Jesus replied, “They that be whole need not a physician.” They thought they were healthy. The sinners knew how much they needed the Lord. Luke 10:28, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus asked, “What is written in the Law?” He replied, “Thou shalt love...” Jesus said, “This *do* and thou shalt live.” Do it, but do it perfectly, if you can.

This can also occur in a word, instead of a story. This is called “*Antanaclasis*”. You use the same word but in a different meaning. “The *wages* of sin is death”, Romans 6:23, Romans 3:27, “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay, but by the *law* of faith.” “What must I do that I might work the works of God?” “This is the *work* of God that you believe on Him that sent Me.” John 6.

**J. The Syllogism.** The most common form of reasoning is the syllogism.

“All men are mortal,  
Socrates was a man,  
Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

John 15:19 The world hates all who believe in Jesus, You believe in Jesus, Therefore the world hates you. John 8:47 He who is of God hears God’s words, you do not hear them, therefore you are not of God.

**K. Condensed syllogisms, *Enthymeme.*** The beatitudes are abridged syllogisms. “All those that inherit the earth are blessed, The meek shall inherit the earth, Therefore the meek are blessed. Also John 8:39-40; Luke 5:21; 1 Cor. 2:16, Jesus’ words to Nicodemus, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” John 3:5.

**L. Sorites, or a series of syllogisms.** Romans 10:13-15 “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed, and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?...” Also Rom. 5:3-5; 1 Cor. 15:12ff; Rom. 8:28ff.

**M. Fallacies.** Jesus often had to tell people that their thinking was false, because they did not know the Word of God. Matt. 22:29; Luke 11:17; Rom. 6:1. Today too, such fallacies are heard... “If God is the God of love, how can He send anyone to hell?”

Or, “The Bible tells us that Cain killed his brother Abel, We should do what the Bible tells us, Therefore, Go thou and do likewise.” Or the one the children like to direct to the pastor, “If God is almighty, could He make a stone so big that He could not lift it?”

## **16. Our chief assignment**

In the Old Testament our Lord spoke to *the prophets* and gave them their message to the sinful world, Ezek. 14:6, “Thus saith the Lord God, Repent and turn yourselves from your idols.” Joel 2:13, “Rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God.” 1 Kings 8:47ff “Yet if they shall...repent, saying, We have sinned, and so return unto Thee with all their heart, then hear Thou their prayer in heaven!”

*John the Baptist* proclaimed, “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Then *Jesus* took up the cry, Mark 1:14-15. “The Kingdom of God is at hand, repent ye, and believe the Gospel.”

And now, our gracious Lord *speaks to us*, “Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead, the third day, and that repentance and, remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations...and ye are witnesses of these things...Ye will be endued with power from on high.”

This is our chief assignment, and our great privilege, and a blessed one it is. May we do it faithfully!