

Christianity 101



What does it mean to be a Christian?

I have met so many people who have come here from other countries and cultures who believe that America is a Christian country and so most everyone in America must be a Christian. So, when they see all the violence, immorality and corruption that is in the American culture many think that is Christianity.

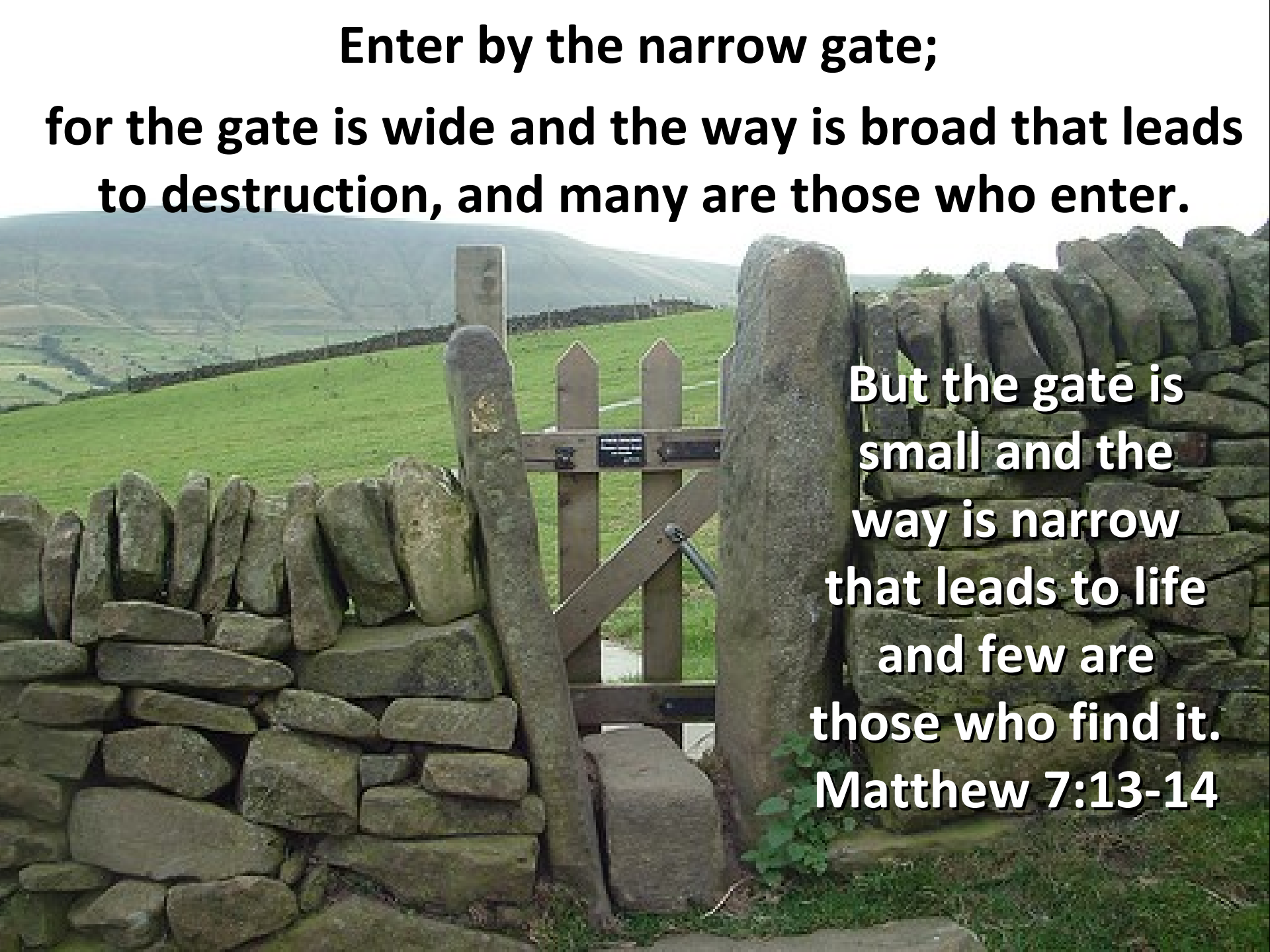
Only God knows the heart but according to the Bible very few Americans who would claim to be Christians would qualify.

This study is not intending to convince you to become a Christian, that is between you and God. All I want do in this lesson is show the difference between what the Bible defines as true Christians and the American people you may see on TV or in the movies.

Christianity is free, but it's not easy.

Enter by the narrow gate;

for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter.

A photograph of a stone wall with a narrow wooden gate. The gate is made of dark wood and is slightly ajar. The wall is constructed from large, grey, rectangular stones. In the background, there is a green valley with rolling hills and a small building in the distance. The sky is overcast.

**But the gate is
small and the
way is narrow
that leads to life
and few are
those who find it.
Matthew 7:13-14**

What is the Narrow Gate?

Many people who call themselves “Christians” think if they just invite Jesus to save them from God’s eternal judgement they are now free to live any way they choose. Most will try to be good people but is this really the Narrow Gate that Jesus was talking about? If you claim that Jesus is your Lord that means that He is the boss, He is your Master.

Okay, what does that mean?

Let’s start with John the Baptist.

Who is John the Baptist?



I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.
Matthew 3:3 (Isaiah 40:3)

The Greatest Prophet

700 years before Christ was born Isaiah predicted that a prophet would come first to prepare the way for the Messiah.

Jesus said John was the greatest prophet who ever lived until then. Matthew 11:11

What was his message?



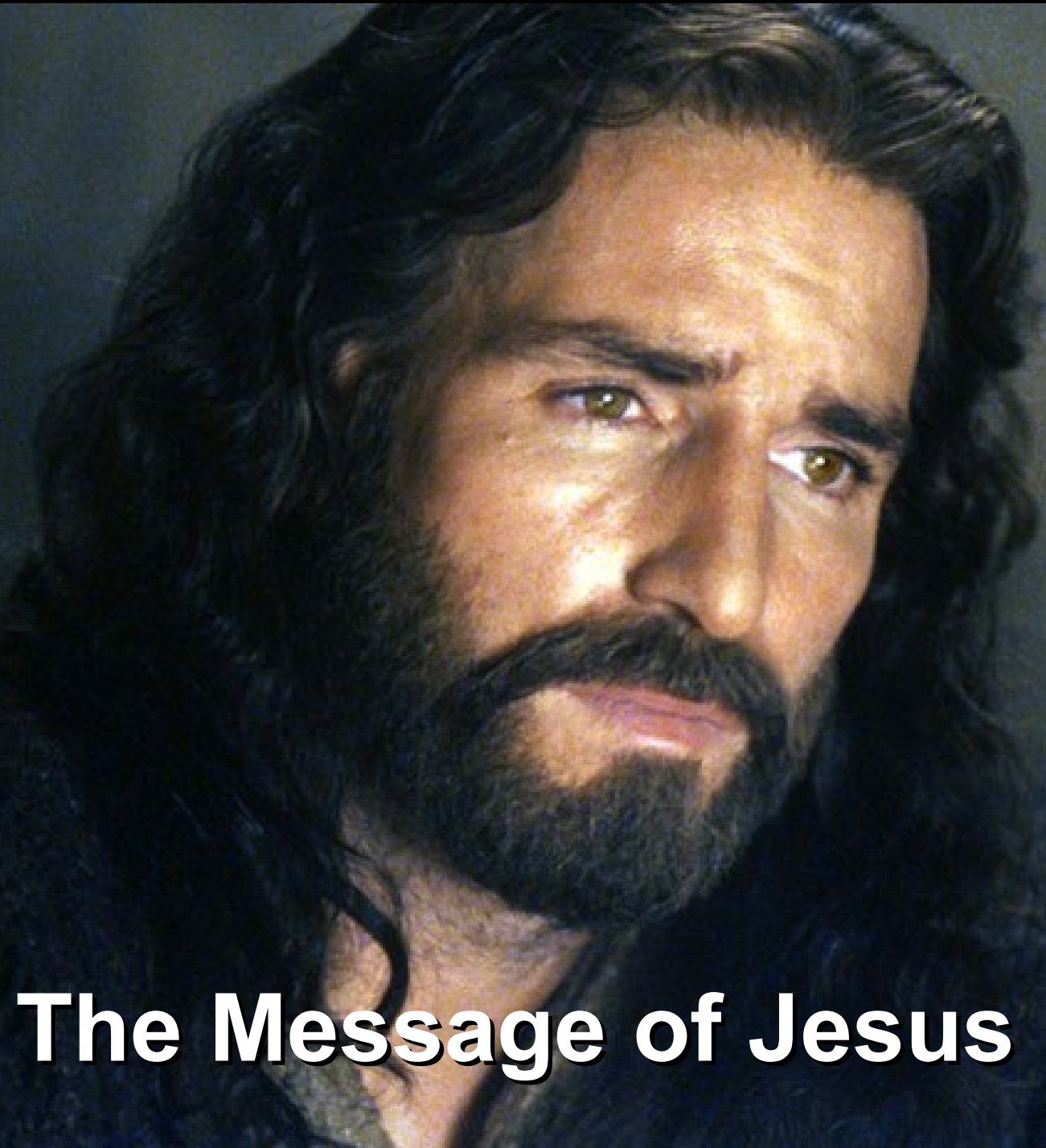
The Message of John

In those days
John the Baptist
came, preaching
in the Desert of
Judea and saying,
“Repent, for the
kingdom of heaven
is near.”

Matthew 3:1-2

Repent

That seems pretty simple. But maybe that was just John. What did Jesus say?



**From that
time on
Jesus
began to
preach,
“Repent,
for the
kingdom of
heaven is
near.”**

**Matthew
4:17**

The Message of Jesus



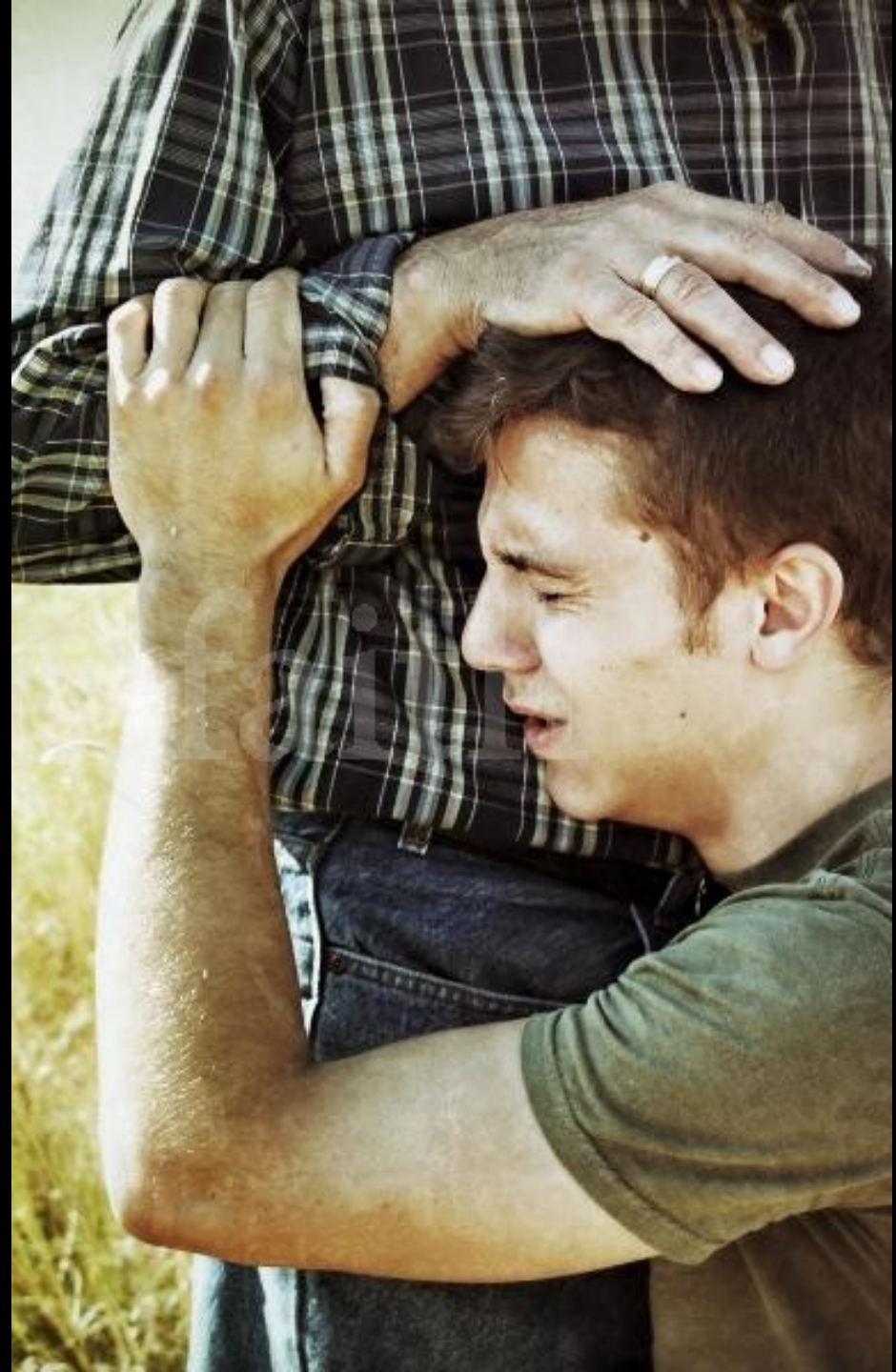
That's the same message, but what
is repentance?

What is Repentance?

**Repentance is a
Change of Direction...**

**In the story of the
prodigal son, this
son turned back from
his sinful life and
came back to his
father to ask his
forgiveness.**

**The father was waiting
with open arms.**



What is repentance?

Repentance is not just being sorry about something you did that is wrong but turning completely away from it to do what is right. Most of the time we associate repentance with our moral failures, and it certainly includes that, but we have to remember that the Jewish people were among the most moral people on the planet and Jesus expressed His anger most against their religious leaders.

By grace you are saved through faith. Ephesians 2:8-9

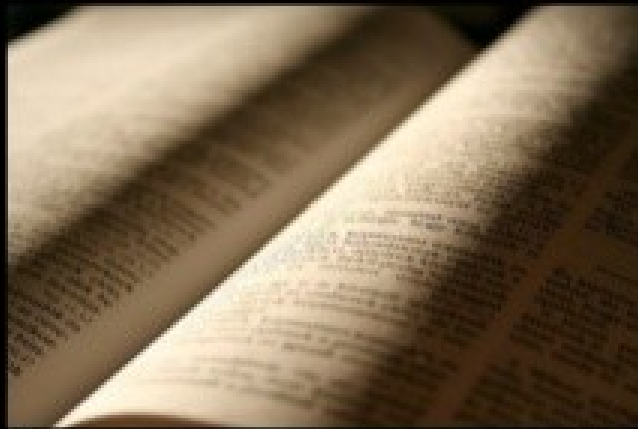
Repentance is more about faith. You can't say you believe in Jesus and then put all of your faith and trust in your career or your investments.

Are you sacrificing your time with God and your relationships and ministry with people in order to serve the master of money and social status? If so, then you are trying to serve two masters.

Are we serving other gods?

Most Americans, who call themselves Christians, will give God two hours on Sunday and then spend the rest the week worshiping the gods of materialism, career advancement, sex, sports, politics, education, etc...

The first commandment is, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” Exodus 20:3



~ Jesus of Nazareth in
The Gospel of Matthew, 6:24

“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other.
You cannot serve both God and money.”

Is it wrong to own things?

It's not wrong to have nice things but when we are trusting in those things for our peace and our joy and our meaning and purpose in life then we are serving other gods.

Trusting in Jesus means we are repenting of the faith that we have in the things of this world and turning to Jesus as the total source and fulfilment of our lives.

No one can serve two masters.

That's great but is this really the message of the Gospel? Can we find the call to repentance anywhere else in the Scriptures?

The Message of the Disciples



Calling the twelve to Him, He sent them out two by two. They went out and preached That people should repent. Mark 6:7,12

The Message of Jesus

In the same way,
I tell you, there is
rejoicing in the
presence of the
angels of God
over one sinner
who repents.

Luke 15:10



After the Cross?

Okay, but that was before the cross. Did the message change after Jesus rose from the dead?

The Message of Jesus After the Cross



And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

“This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,

And repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

Luke 24:27,45-48

The Message of Peter to the Jews



Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene... delivered up by the predetermined plan of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Acts 2:22-37

The Worst Sin

This has to be the worst sin ever committed in the history of the world. They were responsible for the brutal death of the Son of God in human form. And they said, “What do we do now? How can we ever be forgiven for that?”

The Message of Peter to the Jews



**Peter replied,
“Repent and be
baptized, every
one of you, in the
name of Jesus
Christ for the
forgiveness of your
sins. And you will
receive the gift of
the Holy Spirit.**

Acts 2:38

The Message of Peter to the Romans

A large, faint cross is centered in the background. In the foreground, there are silhouettes of a family: a woman holding a child's hand, another child, and a man standing to the right. The background is a bright, hazy light, possibly representing a sunrise or sunset.

When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.”

Acts 11:18

What is repentance unto life?

What we have been talking about is the repentance that leads to eternal life. That is necessary only once. When that happens you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and are **born again** spiritually into God's family.

But after that, as Christians, we still sin and we still need to repent and turn back to God. The difference is now we repent because of our love for Him and our desire to honor and please Him.

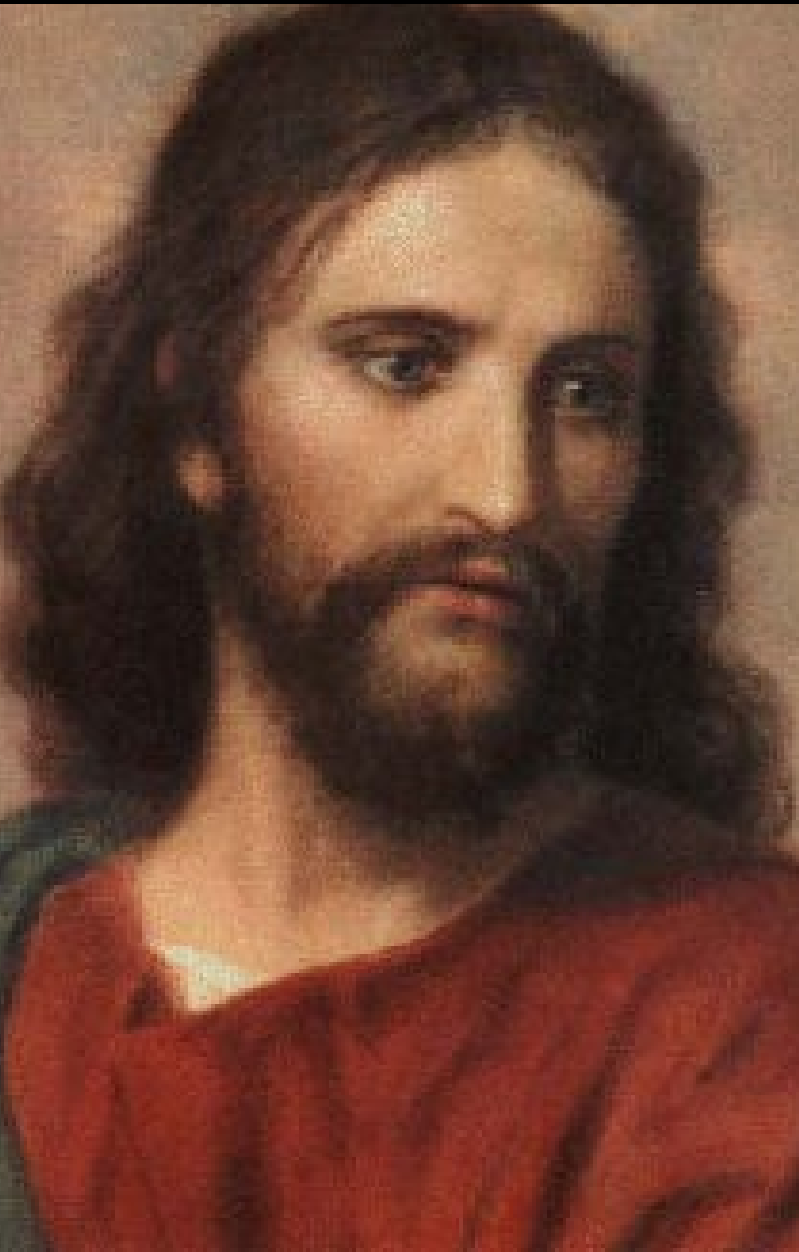
The Message of Paul to the Jews and the Greeks



I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

Acts 20:18,21

The Message of Peter to the World



**The Lord is not slow
in keeping his promise,
as some understand
slowness. He is patient
with you, not wanting
anyone to perish,
but everyone to come
to repentance.**

II Peter 3:9

Two or Three Witnesses

The reason I'm showing all these verses on repentance is that I want you to see that this is not an isolated verse taken out of context but is repeated consistently where ever the Gospel is preached.

Every truth must be established by at least two or three witnesses. Matthew 18:16



The Message of Paul to King Agrippa

“So then, King
Agrippa, I was not
disobedient to the
vision from heaven.
I preached that they
should repent and turn
to God and prove their
repentance by their
deeds.”

Acts 26:19-20

The proof is in the fruit.

So how can we know if there really has been true repentance in our lives. How can we know that we are Christians?

If we have truly been born again there should be evidence of a change. Why? Because we are new creatures.

II Corinthians 5:17

Is there any fruit?



**Thus, by
their fruit
you will
recognize
them.**

**Matthew
7:20**

An Eternal Perspective

Being a Christian gives you a whole new perspective on life. You begin to see things in this world as temporary and empty and only eternal things have eternal value.

There are only three things in this world that have eternal value: God, God's word and people. Everything else will be left behind and eventually burned up.

**But whatever things were
gain to me I now consider
loss for the sake of Christ.**

**What is more, I consider
everything a loss because
of the surpassing value of
knowing Christ Jesus my
Lord, for whose sake I
have lost all things.**

**I consider them garbage,
that I may gain Christ.**

Philippians 3:7-8



Can I be a Christian without repentance?

Some might say, “My church doesn’t teach that you have to repent to become a Christian, (most churches in America don’t), so is repentance really necessary?”


**How will God deal with
you if you choose not to
Repent?**



**Or do you show
contempt
for the riches of
His kindness,
tolerance and
patience, not
realizing that
God's kindness
leads you
toward
repentance?**

Rom 2:4-6

How will God deal with you if you choose not to Repent?



But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when His righteous judgment will be revealed. Romans 2:4-6

Could this be you?

In other words, many will say, “My life is all about my things. My job, my family, my house, my car and all my other things that make me happy including my sins, (the ones that don’t hurt anyone else).

But there’s still something missing. I need to add God to all my stuff. I like Jesus, I like the Bible, the people at church are really nice.

I think I’ll add Jesus to all my stuff.

Could This Be You?



Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 7:20-23

Could This Be You?

Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?

Then I will tell them plainly,

'I never knew you.

Away from Me,
you evildoers!'

Matthew 7:20-23



This has to be about the scariest verse in the Bible.

When I stand before Christ on the day of judgement I want to hear Him Say, “Well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Lord.” Matthew 25:21

How can I do that?

Repentance is total commitment

The salvation Jesus offers is a free gift. Jesus paid the full price for our sins when he died on the cross. There is nothing we can do to earn what only God can give us for free.

But it's a free gift that will cost us everything. It's a free gift that can only be received with empty hands. Either Jesus is Lord, and Lord alone, or He isn't.

That's hard to do. Is it really worth it?

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. Matthew 13:45-46



We can't even imagine how much God's Kingdom is worth.

For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

II Corinthians 4:17

The message of John

Therefore
bring forth
fruits in
keeping
with
repentance.

Luke 3:8-14



Now What?

Finally, back to our message from John the Baptist.

After the people who have repented from the religious system of Judaism and have been baptized as a sign of their faith, they want to know, now what? What does this mean? What do we do now?

What Shall We Do??



And the multitudes were questioning him, saying, **“Then what shall we do?”** And he would answer and say to them, **“Let the man who has two coats share with him who has none. Let him who has food do the same.”** Luke 3:10-11

The people

In other words, have compassion for people in need. Have the same kind of love for others that God has for you.

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

I John 3:16-18

What Shall We Do?

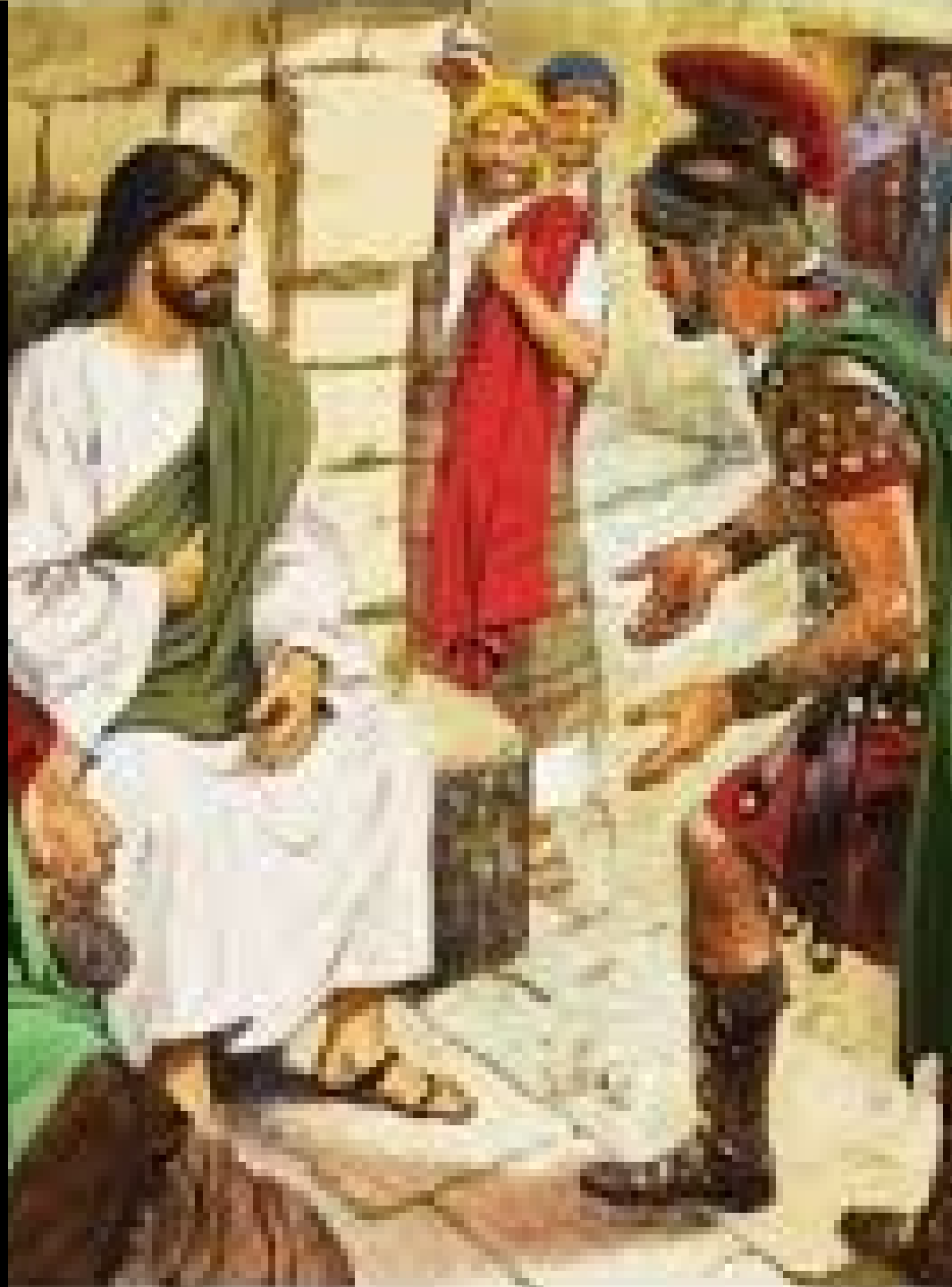


And some tax gatherers also came to be baptized, and they said to him, **“Teacher, what shall we do?”** And he said to them, **“Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.”**
Luke 3:12-13

Tax collectors

He didn't say quit your job, stop being tax collectors. He said do your job honestly. Stop ripping people off. We all have to pay our taxes but it would have been an amazing thing to find a tax collector that wasn't taking something extra for himself.

And some soldiers were questioning him, saying, “**And what about us? What shall we do?**” And he said to them, “Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely. And be content with your wages.”
Luke 3:14



Soldiers

Again John didn't say stop being soldiers. He just said stop abusing your authority. Back then a Roman soldier could stop people and take anything they wanted.

Only God could change the hearts of people like tax collectors and soldiers.

I have
been crucified
with Christ;
and it is no
longer I who
live,
but Christ
lives in me;
Galatians 2:20



**Therefore,
if any man is in
Christ, he is a
new creature.
The old things
have passed
away. Behold,
new things
have come.
II Corinthians
5:17**



Born Again

When you become a Christian God doesn't try to fix the person you are. He makes you into a whole new creation. It's only in our weakness that we go back to acting like our old selves.

In our next lesson we will look at what kind of person this new creation is supposed to be.