Chapter 1 — Metanoia — Turn Around

Turn Around

Sunday Sermon + Wednesday Bible Study on Metanoia (μετάνοια)

Acts 3:19 / 2 Corinthians 7:10 (anchored)

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Big Idea: *There is a Greek word that names the deepest inward action the gospel ever requires of a sinner. Metanoia. From meta (after, beyond) and nous (mind). Literally, an after-thought, a changed mind, a new mind. The repentance the apostles preached was not merely feeling bad about sin. It was a change of mind that produced a change of direction. Turn around. The sinner who keeps walking the same way after hearing the gospel has not yet repented. The saint who has truly metanoia-d has been turned to face a new sun.*

Part One — Sunday Morning Sermon

Turn Around

A Manuscript Sermon on the Greek Word Metanoia (μετάνοια)

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." — Acts 3:19

"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." — 2 Corinthians 7:10

Word Study: *Metanoia (μετάνοια) — from meta (after, beyond, with a sense of change) and nous (mind, understanding). Literally, an after-thought, a*

change of mind that produces a change of direction. Twenty-two NT uses of the noun, and thirty-four of the cognate verb metanoeō (to change one' s mind, to repent). Found in the preaching of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2, 8, 11), in the preaching of Jesus (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 5:32; 13:3, 5; 24:47), in the apostolic preaching at Pentecost (Acts 2:38), in Peter' s sermon at Solomon' s porch (Acts 3:19), in Paul' s sermon at Athens (Acts 17:30), and in the apostle' s pastoral letters (Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:8–11; 2 Tim. 2:25; 2 Pet. 3:9). The Septuagint uses metanoeō for the great prophetic call to turn back to the Lord. The vocabulary names not feeling bad but turning around — the change of mind that produces a change of direction.

Introduction

Church, the first sermon recorded after Pentecost ended with a one-word command.
When the men of Israel were pricked in their heart by Peter' s preaching and cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"
Peter' s answer began with a single Greek imperative.
Metanoēsate.
Repent.

And the second sermon in Acts — Peter and John at the Beautiful Gate, after the healing of the lame man — ended with another metanoia command. Acts chapter three verse nineteen. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."

Repent ye therefore.
And be converted.
That your sins may be blotted out.

When the times of refreshing.
Shall come from the presence of the Lord.

Beloved, repentance was the first apostolic word at Pentecost. Repentance was the closing apostolic word at the temple. Repentance was the great apostolic word in the missionary preaching in Athens. “God now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30).

And the Greek word the apostles preached was metanoia. The compound is built from meta, the preposition for after or change, and nous, the word for mind. Put them together and you have “an after-thought.” A change of mind. A new mind. A turning.

Beloved, the metanoia the apostles preached was not merely an emotion. It was not just feeling bad about sin. It was not just being sorry. It was a change of mind that produced a change of direction. Turn around. Stop walking the way you were walking. Start walking the other way.

Today I want to walk you through six rooms in the New Testament where metanoia is at work. And I want every saint in this room to leave the building this morning with a fresh willingness to turn around wherever the Spirit has been showing you a wrong direction.

Turn.
Around.

I. The Goodness of God Leadeth Thee

Scripture foundation:

- Romans 2:4 — *“Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”*

- 2 Peter 3:9 — *"The Lord is … longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."*
- Acts 17:30 — *"God … now commandeth all men every where to repent."*
- Luke 15:7 — *"There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."*
- Ezekiel 18:23 — *"Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?"*

The first thing the New Testament wants every saint to know about metanoia is where it comes from.

Romans chapter two verse four. "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"

The goodness of God.
Leadeth thee.
To repentance.

To chrēston tou theou eis metanoian se agei. The goodness of God leads you to repentance. The doctrine here is one of the most pastorally significant in the whole New Testament. Repentance is not something the sinner produces by his own willpower. Repentance is something the goodness of God draws out of the sinner.

Beloved, hear what the apostle just said. The reason you have ever turned to the Lord is that the goodness of God was leading you. The patience of God was waiting on you. The mercy of God was pursuing you. The kindness of God was opening your eyes to a different possibility.

Second Peter three verse nine. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Eis metanoian. Unto repentance. The very reason the Lord is delaying the day of judgment is that He is giving more time for more sinners to come to repentance.

Acts seventeen verse thirty. Paul’ s sermon at Athens. “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.” Paraggellei tois anthrōpois pantas pantachou metanoein. He commands all men everywhere to repent. The command of God is universal. No tribe is exempt. No culture is excused. No nation is outside the call.

Luke fifteen verse seven. The Lord’ s great parable of the lost sheep. “I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.”

Joy.
In heaven.
Over one sinner.
That repenteth.

Beloved, when one sinner turns, the angels of heaven throw a party. Heaven cares about repentance more than we do. Heaven counts every turning. Heaven keeps the register of the metanoia of the saints.

Ezekiel eighteen verse twenty-three — the OT background. “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?”

Look at your neighbor and tell them —
The goodness of God is leading me.

II. The First Sermons of John the Baptist and Jesus

Scripture foundation:

- Matthew 3:2 — *"And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*
- Matthew 3:8 — *"Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance."*
- Matthew 4:17 — *"From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*
- Mark 1:15 — *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."*
- Luke 13:3, 5 — *"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."*

Beloved, the first sermon of John the Baptist and the first sermon of Jesus had the same opening word.

Matthew chapter three verse two. The Baptist comes out of the wilderness preaching. And his first recorded word is, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Metanoeite ēngiken gar hē basileia tōn ouranōn.

Repent ye.
For the kingdom of heaven.
Is at hand.

And the Baptist did not just preach the word. He demanded the fruit of the word. Matthew three verse eight. "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance." Karpon axion tēs metanoias. Fruit worthy of the repentance.

Beloved, the Baptist would not let his hearers settle for the verbal claim of repentance without the visible fruit of

repentance. The fruit was the proof. If the life had not changed, the metanoia had not happened.

Matthew chapter four verse seventeen. “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” The Christ’ s opening sermon. Same word. Same imperative. Same kingdom announcement.

From that time.
Jesus began to preach.
And to say.
Repent.

Mark chapter one verse fifteen records the same in a slightly different form. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” Two imperatives. Repent. Believe.

Luke chapter thirteen verses three and five. The Lord’ s sober warning. “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” Repeated twice in the same chapter. The Lord wanted His hearers to feel the weight.

Except ye repent.
Ye shall all.
Likewise.
Perish.

Beloved, the great preaching ministries of the New Testament — the Baptist, the Christ, the twelve, the seventy, the apostles, the prophets — were all metanoia-preaching ministries. The first word of every great preacher in the apostolic church was the same. Turn around. The kingdom has come. The Christ has come. The day of the Lord is coming. Get your face pointed in the right direction before it is too late.

Look at your neighbor and tell them —
Turn around.

III. Repent and Be Baptized

Scripture foundation:

- Acts 2:38 — *"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins."*
- Acts 3:19 — *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."*
- Acts 5:31 — *"Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel."*
- Acts 11:18 — *"Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."*
- Acts 26:20 — *"Repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."*

Now to the great apostolic call at Pentecost. Acts chapter two verse thirty-eight.

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

Repent.
And be baptized.
Every one of you.
In the name of Jesus Christ.
For the remission of sins.
And ye shall receive.
The gift of the Holy Ghost.

Metanoēsate. Aorist imperative. The decisive turning. Coupled immediately with baptisthētō — the decisive immersion. The two go together. Repent and be baptized. The inward turning and the outward washing.

Beloved, the apostolic order was clear. Hear the word. Believe the word. Repent of the sin. Confess the Christ. Be baptized for the remission of sins. Receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Be added to the church. The metanoia was the hinge in the middle. The change of mind that opened the soul to the baptism that washed away the sins.

Acts chapter three verse nineteen — our anchor text. Peter at Solomon' s porch after the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."

Repent.
And be converted.
That your sins.
May be blotted out.

Metanoēsate kai epistrepsate. Two verbs joined by kai. Repent and turn. The inward change and the outward action.

Acts chapter five verse thirty-one. Peter and the apostles before the Sanhedrin. "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Tou dounai metanoian tō Israēl. To give repentance to Israel.

God exalted Him.
To give.
Repentance.
To Israel.

Beloved, the repentance the apostles preached was something God gives. The exalted Christ at the right hand of the Father is the source of repentance. The Spirit who is poured out is the agent of repentance. The sinner who repents is the sinner who has received from heaven the very turning that the apostles preached.

Acts chapter eleven verse eighteen. After Peter explains the conversion of Cornelius. “When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”

God.
Also.
To the Gentiles.
Granted.
Repentance.
Unto life.

The Jerusalem church recognized that repentance had been granted to the Gentiles. The same metanoia they had received at Pentecost had been given to the Roman centurion’ s household in Caesarea. The gospel goes everywhere. The repentance follows everywhere.

Acts twenty-six verse twenty. Paul’ s defense before Agrippa. “But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”

Repent.
And turn to God.
And do works.
Meet for repentance.

Look at your neighbor and tell them —
I have received repentance unto life.

IV. Godly Sorrow Worketh Repentance

Scripture foundation:

- 2 Corinthians 7:10 — *“Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”*

- 2 Corinthians 7:11 — *"What carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation … what zeal, yea, what revenge."*
- Joel 2:12–13 — *"Turn ye even to me with all your heart … rend your heart, and not your garments."*
- Luke 18:13 — *"God be merciful to me a sinner."*
- Psalm 51:17 — *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."*

Now to the second anchor text. Second Corinthians chapter seven verse ten.

"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death."

Godly sorrow.
Worketh repentance.
To salvation.
Not to be repented of.
But the sorrow of the world.
Worketh death.

Hē gar kata theon lupē metanoian eis sōtērian ametamelēton ergazetai. The sorrow according to God works repentance unto salvation not to be regretted. Hē de tou kosmou lupē thanaton katergazetai. But the sorrow of the world works death.

Beloved, the apostle is teaching a critical distinction. Not all sorrow over sin is the same. There is a sorrow that produces metanoia and there is a sorrow that produces death.

Godly sorrow is sorrow over having offended the holy God. Worldly sorrow is sorrow over having been caught, sorrow over the consequences, sorrow over how the sin has made

the sinner look. Worldly sorrow is concerned with self-image. Godly sorrow is concerned with God.

Worldly sorrow says — I am sorry I got caught.
Godly sorrow says — I am sorry I sinned against the Lord.

Worldly sorrow says — look how this has affected me.
Godly sorrow says — look how this has grieved the Spirit.

Worldly sorrow says — I wish I could undo this for my own sake.
Godly sorrow says — I will turn from this for the Lord' s sake.

And the apostle gives the Corinthian church a list of the marks of godly sorrow. Second Corinthians seven verse eleven. "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!"

Carefulness.
Clearing of yourselves.
Indignation.
Fear.
Vehement desire.
Zeal.
Revenge.

Seven marks of godly sorrow. Carefulness — a new attentiveness. Clearing of yourselves — the practical action to make right what was wrong. Indignation — anger at the sin itself. Fear — a healthy reverence for the holy God. Vehement desire — the longing to be restored. Zeal — the renewed eagerness for righteousness. Revenge — the willingness to set right what the sin had set wrong.

Joel chapter two verses twelve and thirteen — the OT prophetic call to true repentance. "Therefore also now, saith

the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil."

Rend your heart.
Not your garments.
And turn unto the Lord your God.

Luke eighteen verse thirteen. The publican' s prayer in the temple. "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner."

Psalm fifty-one verse seventeen. David' s great penitential confession. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Look at your neighbor and tell them —
I will sorrow after a godly sort.

V. The Times of Refreshing

Scripture foundation:

- Acts 3:19–21 — *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ."*
- Isaiah 1:18 — *"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."*
- Psalm 32:1–2 — *"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."*

- 1 John 1:9 — *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*
- Micah 7:19 — *"He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us … and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."*

Now hear what Peter promised would follow the metanoia of his hearers at Solomon' s porch.

Acts chapter three verses nineteen through twenty-one. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."

Your sins may be blotted out.
When the times of refreshing.
Shall come from the presence of the Lord.
And He shall send Jesus Christ.

Eis to exaleiphthēnai hymōn tas hamartias. So that your sins may be wiped out. The Greek picture is of a wax tablet on which the sins had been written, now being scraped clean so that no trace of the writing remains.

Beloved, the blotting out of sins is one of the great gospel pictures. Your sins are not minimized. Not redefined. Not excused. Not relativized. Blotted out. Wiped clean. The record is erased. The tablet is smooth again.

And what comes after the blotting out? Times of refreshing. Kairoi anapsuxeōs. Seasons of cool relief, like the breath of a cool breeze on a hot day, like cold water on a parched throat. The metanoia opens the door to the kairoi anapsuxeōs.

Times of refreshing.
Shall come.
From the presence of the Lord.

Beloved, every saint in this room who has truly repented has tasted the times of refreshing. The conscience that was burdened became light. The heart that was heavy became free. The fellowship with God that had been broken was restored. The presence of the Lord that had felt distant came near.

Isaiah chapter one verse eighteen — the great prophetic invitation. “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

Sins as scarlet.
Shall be as white as snow.

Psalm thirty-two verses one and two. David after the great sin and the great repentance. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity.”

First John one verse nine — the apostolic promise to the saint who continues in the metanoia disposition. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Micah seven verse nineteen — the great prophetic picture of God’ s removal of sin. “He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”

Cast.
All their sins.
Into the depths.
Of the sea.

Look at your neighbor and tell them —
My sins have been blotted out.

VI. The Lord' s Word to the Seven Churches

Scripture foundation:

- Revelation 2:5 — *"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works."*
- Revelation 2:16 — *"Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them."*
- Revelation 2:21–22 — *"I gave her space to repent … and she repented not."*
- Revelation 3:3 — *"Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent."*
- Revelation 3:19 — *"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent."*

Beloved, hear how the risen Christ used the metanoia vocabulary when He spoke to the seven churches of Asia Minor in the Revelation.

Revelation chapter two verse five. To the church at Ephesus. "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

Remember.
From whence thou art fallen.
Repent.
And do the first works.

Beloved, the church at Ephesus had a long history of faithfulness. The apostle Paul had planted it. The apostle John had pastored it. The church had labored and not

fainted. But the church had left her first love. And the risen Christ told the Ephesian church to remember the height from which she had fallen, to repent, and to do the first works.

Revelation chapter two verse sixteen. To the church at Pergamos that had been tolerating false teaching. “Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

Revelation chapter two verses twenty-one and twenty-two. To the church at Thyatira that had been tolerating Jezebel. “And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.”

I gave her space.
To repent.
And she repented not.

Beloved, that is one of the most sobering verses in the whole Bible. God gives space to repent. Not all space is unlimited. There comes a time when the space runs out and the judgment falls. Jezebel had been given space. Jezebel had refused. The judgment was coming.

Revelation chapter three verse three. To the church at Sardis that had a name to live but was dead. “Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief.”

Revelation chapter three verse nineteen. To the church at Laodicea that was lukewarm. “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.”

As many as I love.
I rebuke and chasten.

Be zealous therefore.
And repent.

Beloved, the call to repent does not end at conversion. The Christian who has already repented unto salvation is the Christian who must continue to repent throughout the walk. Where there is a fallen love, the Christian must repent. Where there is a tolerated sin, the Christian must repent. Where there is a lukewarm zeal, the Christian must repent.

And the Christ who calls the churches to repent is the Christ who promises that He is doing the rebuking and the chastening because He loves. The metanoia He calls for is the metanoia of love.

Look at your neighbor and tell them —
I will be zealous and repent.

Conclusion

The world has a different theology of turning.

The world says — just feel bad about it.
Paul says — godly sorrow worketh repentance. (2 Corinthians 7:10)

The world says — your true self is who you have always been.
Jesus says — except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. (Luke 13:3)

The world says — you cannot really change.
Peter says — repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out. (Acts 3:19)

The world says — nobody is paying attention to your private choices.
Acts says — God commandeth all men every where to repent. (Acts 17:30)

The world says — it does not matter to anyone.
Luke says — joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. (Luke 15:7)

Saints, the metanoia the gospel requires is not a feeling. It is a turning. The change of mind that produces the change of direction. The decisive break with the old way and the decisive embrace of the new. The goodness of God leads you to it. The Holy Ghost works it in you. The blood of Christ cleanses you. The times of refreshing meet you there.

Turn.
Around.

Altar Call

Maybe you came in here this morning still facing the wrong direction.
Maybe the Spirit has been showing you a turning you have been postponing.
Maybe you have never come to the Christ in the obedience of repentance and baptism.

The Christ who is exalted at the right hand of the Father to give repentance, the Christ whose goodness has been leading you to this very turning, the Christ whose times of refreshing are waiting on your metanoia — that Christ is calling you to turn around this morning.

If you have never put on Christ in baptism, the household of the turned is open to you today. Hear the gospel (Romans 10:17). Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (John 8:24). Repent of your sins (Acts 17:30). Confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Romans 10:9–10). Be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). And the Lord shall add you that day to the household where the times of refreshing are flowing (Acts 2:47).

If you are a child of God who has been postponing a turning the Spirit has been calling you to, Acts 8:22 says, “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.” Turn around today. The space to repent is still open. The Lord is still calling.

Come.
Bring your sin.
Turn around.

While we stand and sing, won’t you come?

Amen.

Part Two — Wednesday Night Bible Study

A Companion Lesson on Metanoia (μετάνοια)

This lesson is designed for a 45–60 minute class. Open with Acts 3:11–26 read aloud as the great apostolic call to repentance at the temple. Then survey Acts 2:36–41 (Pentecost), Romans 2:1–11 (the goodness that leads to repentance), 2 Corinthians 7:8–11 (godly versus worldly sorrow), and Revelation 2:1–7 (the call to the Ephesian church to repent). The application questions work best when the class first names the specific turnings the Spirit has been calling for in each saint' s life.

1. Passage Context

Acts 3:19 sits in the second great apostolic sermon recorded in Acts. The setting is Solomon' s porch in the temple complex in Jerusalem, shortly after the day of Pentecost. Peter and John had been on their way to the temple at the hour of prayer when they encountered a lame man at the Beautiful Gate. Peter had healed the man in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and the lame man had gone walking and leaping and praising God. A crowd had gathered.

Peter took advantage of the moment to preach his second great post-Pentecost sermon. The structure of the sermon: the healing was not by Peter' s own power (3:12), but by the God of Abraham who has glorified Jesus (3:13–15); the lame man' s healing was by faith in the name of Jesus (3:16); the killing of the Christ was done in ignorance, but the prophets had foretold that the Christ should suffer (3:17–18); therefore repent and be converted (3:19); and the Christ will return at the times of restitution of all things (3:20–21).

Verse 19 is the climactic apostolic call. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when

the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." Two imperatives: metanoēsate (repent) and epistrepsate (turn, be converted). Two results: the blotting out of sins and the coming of the times of refreshing.

2 Corinthians 7:10 sits in the Pauline pastoral correspondence with the Corinthian church. After the apostle' s earlier severe letter (now lost) had reached the Corinthians and produced a strong response, Paul writes to acknowledge their godly grief and to commend the repentance it produced. Verses 8–11 develop the distinction between godly sorrow (which works repentance unto salvation) and worldly sorrow (which works death). Verse 11 lists seven marks of true godly sorrow.

The two anchor texts work together. Acts 3:19 gives the apostolic call to repent. 2 Corinthians 7:10 gives the diagnostic distinction between true repentance (the kind that works salvation) and false repentance (the kind that works death). The two together protect the apostolic doctrine from both legalism (repentance as mere external religious gesture) and antinomianism (repentance as merely an inward feeling without outward change).

2. Historical and Cultural Background

The Greek noun metanoia is built from meta (after, beyond, with implications of change) and nous (mind, understanding, the seat of thought and will). The literal meaning is "an after-thought" or "a change of mind." In classical Greek the word was often used in the simple psychological sense of changing one' s mind about something — regretting a previous decision, reconsidering a position, modifying an opinion. The classical use was relatively shallow.

In the Septuagint and the NT, the vocabulary deepens significantly. The Hebrew background includes two related verbs: nacham (to be sorry, to console oneself, to repent) and

especially shuv (to turn, to return). The Hebrew prophetic call to repentance was overwhelmingly the call to shuv — to turn back to the Lord. The Septuagint sometimes translated shuv with epistrephō (to turn back) and sometimes with metanoeō (to change the mind), with the two verbs functioning as a hendiadys for the full action of turning.

The NT preserves this hendiadys. Acts 3:19 has "repent (metanoēsate) and be converted (epistrepsate)" — the change of mind and the turning of the direction. The two verbs together cover both the inward and the outward dimensions of true repentance. The metanoia happens in the mind; the epistrophē shows up in the life.

In the Greco-Roman moral philosophical tradition, the call to change one' s mind was not unfamiliar. The Stoics, the Epicureans, the Cynics all called their hearers to reconsider their lives and to embrace different values. But the apostolic call to metanoia was sharper than any of these. The Christian call was not merely to a different lifestyle or a different philosophy; it was to a turning toward the crucified and risen Jesus as Lord. The metanoia was Christologically focused, eschatologically motivated, and sacramentally enacted through baptism.

A pastoral note for the class: the African-American Christian tradition has carried the metanoia theology with extraordinary depth. The historic Black church developed a tradition of altar-call preaching in which the moment of decision — the turning around — was given particular weight in the assembly. The spirituals ("I have decided to follow Jesus", "Lord, I' m coming home", "Just as I am, without one plea" in the Black-church cadence, "Pass me not, O gentle Saviour"), the preaching tradition of the historic Black congregations, and the testimony tradition of "the day the Lord turned me around" all preserved the apostolic metanoia of the New Testament. The doctrine of Acts 3:19 has been preached in this tradition with the full

weight of the times-of-refreshing promise. The turning around brings the breathing space.

3. Keyword Study

1. metanoia (μετάνοια) — G3341 — "change of mind; repentance; turning around"

Twenty-two NT uses. The noun. Names the inward change of mind that produces the outward change of direction. Found in the preaching of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:8, 11; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3, 8; Acts 19:4), in the preaching of the apostles (Acts 5:31; 11:18; 13:24; 20:21; 26:20), and in the pastoral exhortations (Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:9–10; 2 Tim. 2:25; Heb. 6:1, 6; 12:17; 2 Pet. 3:9).

> **Why it matters:** *Metanoia names the foundational inward movement of Christian conversion and Christian growth. Without metanoia there is no entrance into the kingdom and no progress within it.*

2. metanoeō (μετανοέω) — G3340 — "to change one's mind; to repent; to turn around"

Thirty-four NT uses. The verb form. The standard NT vocabulary for the act of repentance. Used in the preaching of the Baptist (Matt. 3:2), the Christ (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 5:32; 13:3, 5; 17:3–4), the apostles (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 26:20), and the Christ in the Revelation (Rev. 2:5, 16, 21–22; 3:3, 19).

> **Why it matters:** *The verb covers the imperative call. The apostles preached an imperative metanoeō — an active turning, not a passive consideration. The gospel requires the action of the verb, not just the description of the noun.*

3. epistrephō (ἐπιστρέφω) — G1994 — "to turn back; to return; to convert"

Thirty-six NT uses. The companion verb to metanoeō. Often paired with it in the apostolic preaching (Acts 3:19; 26:20). Where metanoeō names the inward change of mind, epistrephō names the outward turning of the direction. The two verbs together cover the full action of conversion — the change inside and the change outside.

> **Why it matters:** *True repentance has both dimensions. The mind that has been changed shows up in feet that walk a different way. The apostolic pairing protects against a merely intellectual or merely emotional repentance that does not produce the visible turning.*

4. metamelomai (μεταμέλομαι) — G3338 — "to regret; to be sorry; to feel remorse"

Six NT uses. A related but distinct verb. Names the emotional dimension of regret. Used of Judas' regret after betraying the Christ (Matt. 27:3) — but notice that Judas' metamelomai did not produce metanoia. He felt regret but did not turn. The two are not interchangeable. The vocabulary distinguishes between feeling sorry (metamelomai) and turning around (metanoeō).

> **Why it matters:** *The distinction is pastorally critical. Many saints have metamelomai-d (felt regret) over their sins without ever metanoeō-ing (turning around). The gospel requires the latter, not merely the former.*

5. anapsuxis (ἀνάψυξις) — G403 — "refreshing; cool breath; revival"

One NT use — Acts 3:20. The Greek word names the cool relief that comes when a hot, thirsty person finds shade and water. Peter promises that the metanoia will be followed by the kairoi anapsuxeōs — the seasons of refreshing — from the presence of the Lord.

Why it matters: *The metanoia is not just the painful turning away from sin; it is the entrance into the refreshing presence of the Lord. The doctrine connects the turning to the breathing space, the change of mind to the renewed soul, the repentance to the refreshing.*

4. Commentary Insights

- A. T. Robertson, in his Word Pictures, draws careful attention to the pairing of metanoēsate and epistrepsate in Acts 3:19. Robertson notes that the two aorist imperatives are coordinated by kai (and) and together name the full action of conversion. The metanoia is the inward change of mind; the epistrophē is the outward turning of the direction. Robertson observes that the apostolic preaching never separated the two.
- Robert Milligan, in his Scheme of Redemption, treats the doctrine of metanoia as one of the great organizing categories of apostolic conversion theology. Milligan' s pastoral framing was that the brotherhood' s practice of demanding the public confession before baptism preserved the apostolic order of metanoia — the change of mind, the turning of direction, the confession of the Christ, and the baptism for the remission of sins.
- J. W. McGarvey, in his Commentary on Acts, treats Acts 3:19 as the doctrinal foundation of the apostolic call to conversion. McGarvey emphasizes that the call to repent and be converted preserves both the inward and the outward dimensions of true Christian conversion. Where one is preached without the other, the doctrine has been distorted.
- Burton Coffman, in his expository notes on 2 Corinthians 7, observes the seven marks of godly sorrow in verse 11 as

the apostolic diagnostic for distinguishing true repentance from false. Coffman emphasizes that the marks are observable — carefulness, clearing, indignation, fear, vehement desire, zeal, revenge. Where these marks are absent, the metanoia has not yet taken place, regardless of how much emotional sorrow has been expressed.

- F. F. Bruce, in his commentary on Acts, draws out the connection between Acts 3:19 and Acts 3:20. The metanoia is to happen now; the times of refreshing are to come now and continually; the sending of Jesus Christ at the second coming is the eschatological climax. The doctrine binds the present moment of repentance to the future hope of the Christ' s return.
- David Lipscomb, in the Gospel Advocate tradition, preached the metanoia texts as the doctrinal foundation of the brotherhood' s commitment to the apostolic order of conversion. Lipscomb' s emphasis was that repentance was an act of the will produced by the goodness of God and required of every sinner who would come to Christ. Where repentance had been moralized away or emotionalized away, the apostolic gospel had been compromised.
- Marshall Keeble, the great preacher of the brotherhood, preached the metanoia texts in the cadence of the historic Black-church "the day the Lord turned me around" tradition. Keeble' s characteristic application was that every saint had a turning-around story, and that the church was a community of the turned-around. The doctrine of Acts 3:19 was the apostolic word that gathered every personal testimony into one corporate apostolic confession.

- R. N. Hogan, longtime editor of The Christian Echo, wrote often about the relationship between the apostolic metanoia preaching and the African-American testimony tradition of conversion narrative. Hogan' s pastoral conviction was that the church which had lost the practice of repentance preaching had lost the apostolic gospel. Where the call to turn around was no longer heard, the sinners were no longer turning around.

5. Cross-References and Parallel Passages

- **Acts 3:19 —** The anchor text. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.
- **2 Corinthians 7:10 —** "Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of."
- **Acts 2:38 —** "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins."
- **Acts 17:30 —** "God now commandeth all men every where to repent."
- **Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15 —** The first sermons of John the Baptist and Jesus — Repent.
- **Romans 2:4 —** "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance."
- **Luke 13:3, 5 —** "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."
- **Luke 15:7, 10 —** Joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.
- **2 Peter 3:9 —** "Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

- **Revelation 2:5; 3:19 —** The risen Christ's call to the churches to repent.

6. Theological Themes

- Repentance as the gift of God. Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25 establish that repentance is something God gives. The sinner does not produce repentance by his own willpower; the sinner receives repentance from the exalted Christ at the right hand of the Father. The doctrine protects the gospel from being moralized into a self-help program.
- The goodness-of-God origin of repentance. Romans 2:4 establishes that the goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering of God lead the sinner to repentance. The doctrine protects repentance from being grounded in the fear of judgment alone; the deepest motive for turning is the kindness of the God who is calling.
- The pairing of inward change and outward turning. The apostolic pairing of metanoeō and epistrephō protects against both a merely intellectual repentance (changed mind but no changed life) and a merely external repentance (changed behavior but no changed heart). Both dimensions are required.
- The distinction between godly and worldly sorrow. 2 Corinthians 7:10 establishes the critical diagnostic between the sorrow that produces salvation and the sorrow that produces death. The marks of godly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:11) provide observable criteria.
- Repentance as the ongoing posture of the Christian, not just the entrance. The risen Christ' s letters to the seven churches (Rev. 2–3) repeatedly call the saints to repent —

the church at Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Laodicea all receive the call. The metanoia of the Christian is not exhausted at conversion; it continues throughout the walk.

7. Thinking Prompts

1. Trace metanoia and metanoeō through their major NT uses — the first sermons of the Baptist and the Christ (Matt. 3:2; 4:17), Pentecost (Acts 2:38), Solomon' s porch (Acts 3:19), Athens (Acts 17:30), the goodness-of-God passage (Rom. 2:4), the seven-marks passage (2 Cor. 7:8–11), and the letters to the seven churches (Rev. 2–3). What cumulative portrait of apostolic repentance emerges?
2. Robertson notes the apostolic pairing of metanoeō and epistrephō. What pastoral problems arise when one is preached without the other? Where in our cultural moment have we drifted toward one at the expense of the other?
3. The distinction between metanoia and metamelomai is sharp in the NT — Judas felt metamelomai but did not metanoia. Where in your own walk have you felt regret (metamelomai) without actually turning (metanoeō)? What does the apostolic vocabulary require of you?
4. F. F. Bruce ties Acts 3:19 to the eschatological hope of Acts 3:20–21. How does the future hope of the Christ' s return motivate the present call to repent? Where have we let the eschatology weaken in our preaching?
5. Marshall Keeble preached metanoia in the cadence of "the day the Lord turned me around." Tell the story of your own turning-around moment. What was happening? Who was involved? How has the Lord been continuing the turning since?
6. The risen Christ' s letters to the seven churches call established congregations to repent. What does this teach us about the relationship between Christian conversion

and ongoing Christian growth? How should this shape our preaching to long-faithful saints?

8. Application Discussion Questions

7. Name a specific area in your life where the Spirit has been calling you to turn around. What does the actual turning — the change of direction, not just the change of feeling — look like this week?
8. Read 2 Corinthians 7:11 aloud as a class. Honestly examine yourself by the seven marks — carefulness, clearing of yourselves, indignation, fear, vehement desire, zeal, revenge. Where have you seen these marks in your own repentance over a particular sin? Where have they been missing?
9. R. N. Hogan wrote that the church which has lost the practice of repentance preaching has lost the apostolic gospel. Where in our preaching, teaching, and pastoral care have we softened the call to metanoia? What single recovery would change us?
10. Romans 2:4 says the goodness of God leads to repentance. Where in your own walk has the goodness of God been the leading motive for your turning? Tell the story. How does the goodness-of-God motive differ from the fear-of-judgment motive?
11. Read Revelation 2:5 aloud. “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works.” Where in your own walk have you fallen from a previous height? What were the first works in that season that you have stopped doing? What does returning look like?
12. Read Acts 3:19–20 aloud as the closing of the lesson. “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.” Spend two minutes in silence and ask: where in my walk have I been resisting a turning the Spirit has been calling for, and how much

have I been missing the times of refreshing because of that resistance? What single turning this week would open the door to the refreshing?