

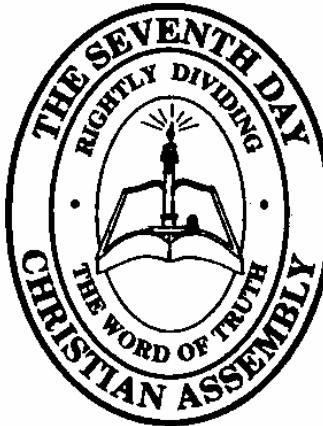
Rightly Dividing

THE

WORD OF TRUTH

Bible Study Course

Lesson Six:
Repentance from Dead Works



*Since the God who made the earth and everything in it is Himself Lord of heaven and earth...He did this so that all nations might seek the deity and, by feeling their way toward Him, succeed in finding Him. He now commands everyone everywhere to **repent** because He has fixed a day when the whole world will be judged, and judged in righteousness. He has appointed [Jesus Christ] to be the judge...by raising Him from the dead. (Acts 17:24-31; author's paraphrase of The Jerusalem Bible)*

*They asked: 'Brothers, what must we do?' And Peter replied: 'You must **repent** – every one of you – and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the Holy Spirit.' (Acts 2:38, 39; author's paraphrase of The Jerusalem Bible)*

an open letter from

The Pastor

I found a peculiar statement by C. S. Lewis in his famous work *Mere Christianity* that I thought would bear some scrutiny – especially in light of the statements made by the Apostle Paul in Acts 17:24-31 and the Apostle Peter in Acts 2:38, 39. Lewis said this: “Remember, this *repentance*, this willing submission to humiliation and a kind of death, *is not something God demands of you* before He will take you back and which He could let you off if He chose: it is simply *a description* of what going back to Him is like” (Touchstone: New York; 1980, p. 60; emphasis added). My first response to his statement that God does not demand our repentance was simple: “**WHAT!?**” I could scarce believe that such a noteworthy “Christian” figure would or could say such a thing! And this from a man who deftly works his way through so many knotty questions that confront average, ordinary “Christians” and their “faiths.” Would *you* have had a similar reaction to that statement?

I understand the context in which the statement is made. He is discussing “the perfect penitent” in relationship to the death of Jesus Christ – the fact that people generally believe that we must repent because Jesus came to earth to suffer, be killed, and be raised from the dead for our sins – for our desecration of God in favor of the Great Rebel, Satan the Devil. He says: “What I came to see later on was that neither this theory [regarding the death of Jesus Christ] nor any other is Christianity....Theories about Christ’s death are not Christianity: they are explanations about how it works” (p. 58).

It appears from the wider discussion that he conceives of the various “Christian” denominations as representing the various “theories” about how “it works.” He would say that they all can be true to *mere Christianity* – the *core beliefs* they all have in common...supposedly – yet, be totally at odds with one another in their “theories.” Their differences in *theories* would not matter much to God. But, does that conclusion make sense in view of the 32,000+ “Christian” denominations? For several years I taught that there exists a mere 400+ “Christian” denominations. Then, about 2001, I learned from a documentary on *The History Channel* that there were over 20,000. Recently, in a telecast of *Tomor-*

row’s World (Richard Ames was the presenter), that there presently exist almost 33,000! The doctrinal differences among them *greatly expand* the reason for concern – especially in light of Christ’s prophetic warning in Matthew 24:4, 5!

To the point at hand: Is repentance *demanded* by God *before* you can return to Him? Or, as Lewis so confidently asserts, are the various concepts of repentance simply “theories” – descriptions – about what going back to God is like? As you might well deduce, this calls for a thorough explanation of the biblical concept of repentance and whether or not God *demands* it of us before He will allow us entrance to the blessings, promises, covenants, and kingdom. Let’s consider a few salient points before we get into the lesson.

At the beginning of the ministry of Jesus Christ, He made the following announcement: “The time has come and the Kingdom of God is drawing near. *You are to repent and believe the gospel*” (Mark 1:15; author’s paraphrase; emphasis added; see also Matthew 4:12-17). How remarkable is it that such statements accompany the beginning of the ministry of Jesus Christ – yet, go unnoticed as *demands* from *God* (see Matthew 1:23) that we should *repent*? How many times during His 3+ year ministry would you suppose that demand was repeated?

I agree with Lewis that the *fact* of repentance is “...infinitely more important than any explanation that theologians have produced” (p. 58). It is self-evident that explanations of a process are not the same as the process itself – that they are word pictures of how a thing is done. Read this carefully: “Any theories we build up as to how Christ’s death [disabled death itself]...are...mere plans or diagrams to be left alone if they do not help us, and, even if they do help us, not to be confused with the thing itself” (p. 59).

Now comes the inevitable question: How is a *demand* to repent *merely* a theory – a “mere plan or diagram”? Would you consider a stop sign *merely* a word picture of a plan or diagram – not to be confused with the thing itself? No, it represents a *demand* imposed by a governing body. A *process* called “stop” *must occur* wherever that sign is posted, or a penalty can be imposed by the enforcers of the governing body.

Mathematical and chemical formulas are similar to this. Lewis says that what the formulas represent

(continued on p. 13)

Repentance from Dead Works

The basic – fundamental, or elementary – doctrines of Jesus Christ are listed in Hebrews 6:1, 2. There are seven of them: (1) repentance from dead works, (2) faith toward God, (3) baptisms (plural), (4) laying on of hands, (5) the resurrection of the dead, (6) eternal judgment, and (7) going on to perfection (that is, spiritual maturity; KJV). The first six appear to be a step-by-step formula for achieving number seven. To that end, it should be clear that these are things that must be understood, believed, performed, and taught in order for the true Christian to be spiritually educated enough for reaching spiritual maturity. Further, it should be understood that this is *expected of us* by God Himself. They are not optional. After all, the Apostle Paul wrote that “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: *that the man of God may be perfect, fully equipped and prepared for any good work*” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). That is what you desire, right?

We will now begin a series of studies to explain what each doctrine means and how each relates to your ability to achieve true spiritual maturity and the salvation God has planned for you. It is a *process* for educating you in righteousness, but it is not necessarily a sequential process as listed. For instance, faith toward God might need to precede repentance from dead works; otherwise, what would be the stimulus for changing one’s heart and mind? I will assume at this point that you have an elementary faith in God and want to learn this process. I will begin with repentance from dead works and follow the list as stated above. As always, look up every scripture, answer every question, study, and pray. May God bless your efforts to **learn** and **do**. You will be amazed at what you learn from these fundamental doctrines!

Lesson Six

What Went Wrong?

In coming to grips with why we must repent, it is vitally important to understand what went wrong – and...what penalty was imposed because of it. Once we understand those two things, then we can begin to sort through God’s remedy for fixing it – that is, for repairing the breach and bringing about reconciliation between ourselves and God. After all, the work He started in creating man in His own image is not complete. We don’t get to the completion stage until we are *fully* reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

1. Ephesians 1:4 – When did God choose man “in Christ”? What does “before the foundation of the world” mean?

Comment: The term *world* is translated from the Greek term *kosmos* – shown in the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* to mean “before the everlasting constitution of the universe” and “before the world existed.” That would put it before Genesis 1:1 – what scientists

would place as occurring over 4.5 billion years ago. This was well before the creation of man – *Homo sapien* having come into existence a mere 5,800+ years ago (refer to Lesson Three, p. 14, column B, first paragraph and p. 17, column B, question #17 [**Comment**]).

2. What kind of character did God intend us to have once He created us?

3. Verse 5 – For what purpose did God create mankind?

4. Genesis 1:26, 27 – Does this account by Moses agree with Paul’s account in Ephesians?

5. Genesis 2:8, 9, 15-17 – What did God warn Adam about in this account? Of which tree was he not to eat? What penalty would he suffer if he did? What does the word *die* mean?

Comment: Partaking of the fruit of the knowledge good and evil would lead to **the preservation of mortality** and all that being subject to it implies. Mankind, in fact, would not acquire immortality (exemption from death), much less self-existent, eternal life beyond this physical life, if he ate of the fruit of

the knowledge of good and evil. The Lord God did, indeed, pronounce that death sentence upon Adam and Eve when He said: "...You were taken out of the dust of the earth and to the dust of the earth you shall return" (Genesis 3:19) because He asserted that **mortality** would be their lot.

However, as Simpson put it in his exegesis on this verse in *The Interpreter's Bible*: "...There is no suggestion here that man would have lived forever had he **not** eaten of the forbidden fruit (cf. Gunkel, *Genesis*, pp. 22-23; Skinner, *Genesis*, p. 83). Rather the implication is that man would have regarded death not as the last fearful frustration but as his **natural end**" ("Genesis," vol. 1, p. 512). In other words, it was when the Lord God closed off access to the Tree of Life (vv. 22-24) that He removed any possibility that man would ever have life beyond his "dust-to-dust" existence *unless God Himself intervened*.

Had man not eaten of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, he would have accepted the cessation of his present, physical life as a natural end that looked forward to the next stage of being made in the image of Elohim. Once he ate it, however, he desperately needed to be reconciled to God in order to have the opportunity to move on to being "born again" in the "express image" of God – the ultimate result of being reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

The Hebrew word used for **die** in Genesis 2:17 **does not** mean to break fellowship between two individuals, to die of natural causes, to die as the result of being smitten, or to die as a result of a penalty imposed by some *human* authority. The same word used in Genesis 3:3 means **to die by a penalty exacted by God**. It has to do with the **ultimate destruction** of the individual. The story itself reveals that the Lord God did not intend for Adam to understand that he would **immediately die** a physical death if he ate the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – even though he would **eventually** die a physical death. We know this because Adam and Eve continued to live long after they sinned! In all that the story does not reveal, it could be inferred that the Lord God must have given Adam some measure of instruction about working and taking care of the garden and warned of a dreadful consequence for disobedience – a consequence more serious than merely terminating his physical life: that is, *never* having access to life *after* his physical death.

6. Genesis 3:1-7 – Did Adam and Eve, in fact, eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? What does that mean?

Comment: This is really very simple. When Adam and Eve partook of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, *they*, in effect, chose to be the ones who would make the determination of what is *good* and *evil*. Consider this: the danger of man becoming his own moral compass lies in his *inability to control that knowledge properly*. God, on the other hand, understands how to control the use of that knowledge in order to avoid the inevitable consequences of its misuse.

7. 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22 – By whom did *death* come upon *the human race*? In whom do all humans *die*? Does it appear that God learned something in His experience with Adam and Eve that provoked this decision to include all of his descendants – or...do you think that this was also *part* of the warning about *death*?

Comment: It is a debatable point no matter how you answer the question because "**All** have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). You and I are not innocent victims in this problem because we, in our own turn, have perpetuated the problem of *sin* among humanity. In that way, perhaps, it was part of the warning.

8. Galatians 3:22-24 – What is meant by the expression "...concluded all under sin..." (KJV) or "...consigned all things to sin..." (RSV)?

Comment: Paul is making a distinction between *faith* and *law*. *Faith*, in one sense of the word, means that you take God at His word without trying to impose a *law* upon Him that *requires* Him to do what He says He will do. Abraham received the promises of God through *faith* (see Romans 4:13, 19-22). If God could not trust man to act in *faith*, then He would impose a *law* (a standard for behavior) in order to *train* him to act in *faith* (vv. 23, 24). Adam and Eve did not act on faith: *they did not believe God meant what He said about the effects of eating the fruit of good and evil*. God's response should have been predictable: He would make the judgment that, *apart from faith*, all things *human* would be locked up in the prison of *sin* – therefore, in *death* (see Romans 3:23; 6:23). To that end, He imposed *law* that would *define* sin for us in order to teach us how to obey Him and act on faith (see Romans 7:7, 12). The law is a two-edged sword

because it imposes death upon the trespasser, but it also makes man dependent upon God's *grace* and *mercy* and seek it for redemption. How did God do this?

9. Romans 1:18-32 – Read this thoroughly and understand the *cause-effect relationships* involved. Why is God's wrath revealed? What does this expression mean: "...hold the truth in unrighteousness..." (v. 18; KJV)?

Comment: *The Jerusalem Bible* reads: "keep the truth *imprisoned* in their wickedness"; the RSV reads: "by their wickedness *suppress* the truth"; *Moffat* reads: "*hinder* the Truth by their wickedness"; and *Barclay* translates it: "in their wickedness, willfully *suppress* the truth that is struggling in their hearts." So, the point of this section of scripture has to do with God's wrath expressed toward mankind's *sinful hindrance of His Truth*. What we need to pay attention to from this point on is *what God has decided to do about it*. This is a key piece of spiritual understanding.

10. Verses 19, 20 – How has God manifested to mankind details about His existence? Is mankind excused from *ignorance*?

11. Verses 21-23 – List five things that express the actions of mankind toward God's manifestations.

12. Verses 24-32 – Write down three verses that express God's reaction toward man's hindrance of His Truth with their wickedness.

Comment: Verses 24, 26, and 28 use the expression "...God gave them up/over..." and then gives examples of the things to which they were given up/over. What does this expression mean? To put it simply, God did a "Dr. Phil" on mankind and said, "Well, if you want to be your own moral compass, let's see how that works for you." Specifically, it means that His judgment on their attitudes is a judgment by which He allows the results of their sins to be visited upon them. It involves the simple *cause-effect* principle: their misguided moral principles will *automatically* cause their natural, undesirable results. God would allow them to *know* the deceptive nature of *sin* through *experience*. Someone can *tell* you that the stove is hot and hope that such instruction is sufficient. You can *learn* that way. But you can receive a *deeper education* when you

ignore that warning and put your hand on the stove anyway.

First, because ***they became vain in their worship*** of their own idolatrous "gods," He allowed the cause/effect nature of their filthy sexual enjoyments and practices to come upon them. This would include all of the various sexually transmitted diseases and sexual aberrations – like transvestite fetishism, voyeurism, frotteurism, exhibitionism, sexual sadism and masochism, pedophilia, gender identification disorders, abortions, and on and on – to come upon them. Next, because ***they changed the truth of God into a lie***, as their passions continued to degrade, they fell into homosexuality – abandoning the male/female sexual identities God originally gave to mankind (see Genesis 1:27, 28 – noting especially His intent that they *multiply*. . . a natural impossibility between *same sex* partners). Then, because ***they did not want to retain the knowledge of God*** – not only the existence of the True God, but also the knowledge He reveals – there came the plethora of increasing social problems we have to deal with today.

Paul is very candid in his description of the *cause/effect* nature of *hindering God's truth by our wickedness*. Little by little, generation after generation, these problems manifested themselves in the social fabric of humanity until they have reached the point we see among us today. *This* is what went wrong – and *this* is why we need to be "saved" out of it through Jesus Christ. It should be very obvious that we are incapable of saving ourselves out of the mess we have created.

13. 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22 – Compare the idea in this scripture with Hebrews 7:9, 10. How could we *die in Adam* if we were not even yet *born*? How could Levi *tithe in Abraham* when Levi *had not yet been born*?

Comment: Both of these statements are unusual concepts – especially in light of Ezekiel 18:19, 20. *Dying in Adam* is connected to the original sin and its penalty of *death*. He is expressing the principle of *solidarity* – a special union or bond – among the human race. President John Kennedy used this notion of solidarity in a speech he gave in Berlin, Germany when he told them: "*Ich bin ein Berliner!*" (literally translated, he actually said: "I am *one* Berliner!" – he should have said: "*Ich bin Berliner!*"). He was not actually from Berlin; he was merely telling them that he suffered when they suffered, their pain was his pain, their problems were his problems.

He was stressing the universality (solidarity) of the problems they suffered because of the communist death-grip on so much of the world at that time.

Paul, in Romans 7:24, refers to the human body as a "...body of this *death*..." – that is, a body that is *mortal* and destined to return to the dust *and remain there*, unless God has reason to be merciful and gracious enough to cancel that death sentence. Remember that this was the penalty Adam would suffer if he ate of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. The universality of *sin* and *death* is a proven fact. That quandary entered the human experience through Adam. When God levied that curse upon Adam and Eve, He *included all of their descendants*. One would assume that He reasoned that their offspring would act no differently from the fountainhead!

While you are not accountable for your *father's* sins, you are accountable for doing whatever is necessary to be personally reconciled to God and give Him reason to cancel the death sentence against *you* (remember Colossians 2:9-15 – especially v. 14). Paul points out in this scripture that our way of escape – by a resurrection from the dead – is through Jesus Christ. In these statements, Paul points out the fact that Jesus Christ became the forerunner of a new order of life made possible by faith in Him – just as Adam had introduced into humanity an order of life that would only end in confusion and death.

14. Matthew 24:22 – What does Jesus Christ prophesy as the ultimate result of mankind's knowledge of good and evil – *if God does not intervene?*

15. John 3:16-21 – What has to be done in order for that *condemnation* to be taken away? Do you get *credit* for being just *a good person* or *an innocent child*? Why or why not?

Comment: From the moment of your birth, you are condemned *in Adam*. The innocence of the infant does not cancel the death we are to receive *in Adam*. I know that sounds harsh on God's part, *BUT – and this is important – do not react negatively at this point!* You are going to learn in this Course the very special plan God has for dealing with questions like that. You are going to learn from your very own Bible *God's revealed truth* – not the traditions of so-called "Christianity" that are so lame and contradictory toward one another and God's revelation. The knowledge God provides frees us from the darkness

of not truly understanding Him and His plan of salvation (see John 8:31, 32).

It is important for us to learn the "nuts and bolts" of what went wrong because it helps us to understand the "nuts and bolts" of how God intends to fix it. We should understand just how terribly *wrong* things went as a result of Adam's and Eve's sins. We should understand just how seriously God takes the matter of *sin*.

Understanding "Sin"

In order to understand the nature of *repentance*, we must understand the *sin* in which we are *bound*. *Bound* is the term used in scripture because it carries with it two connotations: *slavery* and *marriage*. We'll use numerous New Testament scriptures to get the picture and to see the consistency in God's word about it. This will be somewhat detailed, so be prepared to *think, think, think*.

1. 1 John 3:4 –How does the Apostle John define *sin*? Use Exodus 20:1-17 as your model of God's *law*. Understand, too, that all commandments, ordinances, and statutes shown in scripture are outgrowths of God's two *great* commandments: (a) *love God supremely* and (b) *love your neighbor as yourself* (Matthew 22:34-40; note especially v. 40).

2. 1 John 5:17 – What does John classify as *sin* in this scripture? What is *unrighteousness*? Look it up in a dictionary and write down as complete a definition as possible.

3. 1 John 1:8, 10; 2:4 – What kind of person has *never sinned*? Do we make God a *liar* if we say we have not sinned? What does God consider *you* to be if *you* claim that *you* have not broken His commandments? Is it evident that God does not leave any of us any "wiggle room"?

4. James 2:10, 11 – How *guilty* are we if we only break *one part* of God's law? How does James explain the situation?

5. Genesis 4:7 – What did God tell Cain was the root cause of his problem? Was it merely a bad attitude about the sacrifices? (See Hebrews 11:4.)

Comment: *The Jerusalem Bible* translates that verse thus: "...If you are ill disposed, is not *sin* at the door like a crouching beast hungering for you, which

you must master?" *The Anchor Bible* translates it: "...If you do not [act right], *sin* is the demon at the door, whose urge is toward you; yet you can be his master." *Moffatt* reads: "If you are sullen, *sin* is lying in wait for you, eager to be at you – yet you ought to master it." Other translations are similar.

6. Would you conclude from these verses that God has always had *law* that would define acceptable behaviors – as well as unacceptable behaviors? In other words, would God have had *standards of behavior* for Adam and Eve – centuries before He gave the laws of the 10 Commandments to the nation of Israel?

7. Romans 5:13 – Did *sin* exist *before* God gave the law to Israel? Is sin attributed to man *without a law*?

8. Verse 14 – Was there *death* from Adam's time to Moses' time? Does that prove the existence of *law*? *Transgression*?

Comment: Think about this very carefully. Of what *sins* were Adam and Eve guilty? Lying? Stealing? Coveting? Dishonoring their *Parent*? Murder (consider bringing the *death penalty* down upon themselves and all of mankind for their sin)? Apply the same rationale to Cain. What do you think?

9. Compare Romans 7:7 to Romans 8:3 – What is the *function* of the law and why is it unable to do more than its *function*?

Comment: Ask yourself whether or not the law can *make you* do what it requires of you? Can it do any more than *define the transgression*? Can it give you the *power* to do it? How about the *Holy Spirit* to do it? If you obey exactly what the law says, have you fulfilled all of the *spirit of the law*? What does Paul mean that the law was *weak through the flesh*? Understand the *function* of the law.

10. 2 Corinthians 10:2-4 – Notice Paul's differentiation between *in the flesh* and *after the flesh*. Since we are made up of *flesh and blood*, can we help *walking in the flesh*? On the other hand, can we *choose not to war after the flesh*?

Comment: Here we see the term *flesh* used in two contexts: (a) a *neutral* context that means nothing more than "the human body" – which could also include seeing things from a human point of view

rather than from God's point of view – and (b) an *ethical* context in which the term *flesh* is inextricably connected to sin. What Paul means when he uses *flesh* in the *ethical* sense is this: the body, with all of its mental, emotional, and physical instincts, is the point seized by *sin* in order to launch its attack on you with the greatest possible prospect of success. Paul, in Galatians 5:13, uses the expression "...*occasion* to the flesh..." to describe this. The Greek word is *aphorme*, which means "a bridgehead or other point of advantage from which to launch an attack." *Sin* – lawbreaking – uses our five senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell) as an *amorphe* to attack our hearts and minds.

How many of these were employed by the tempter in Genesis 3:1-7? *Sight* – Eve *saw* that it was good for food and pleasant to the eyes; *taste* – she and Adam *ate* it; *sound* – they listened to the serpent's spiel; and *touch* – Eve said God had warned them not to even *touch* it (vv. 3, 6). You can probably think of an example where *smell* is connected to temptation and sin. Think of the movie *Scent of a Woman*, starring Al Pacino. What the mind does with the things that affect the five senses is dependent upon whether or not that mind follows what is *holy* or what is *unholy*. If you insist upon being your own moral compass, then the best you can do is *fleshly* (see Isaiah 55:6-9 in order to understand the point).

11. Matthew 15:10-20 – What *defiles* a person in God's sight? From where do the things that come out of a person's *mouth* come? Are you understanding this properly yet?

12. Matthew 5:21-28 – What lessons about *murder* and *adultery* does Jesus teach us here? Is there more to the law than exactly what is written down – *the letter of the law*? Is there something called *the spirit of the law* that comes into play?

Comment: In His exposition in this part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus shows that you can obey the *letter of the law*, yet transgress the *spirit of the law*. Remember Proverbs 23:7 ("As he thinks in his *heart*, so is he.") and Jeremiah 17:9 ("The *heart* is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"). You can *outwardly* obey the letter by physically refraining from transgressing it, but *inwardly* disobey the spirit by harboring the thoughts and emotions that would, in fact, carry out a physical transgression if unleashed. It is evident,

therefore, that the *heart* (the seat of our emotions and mental faculties) is the objective of any attack by any unholy enemy. Satan and sin are the two greatest unholy enemies we will ever face. Why? Because they are *deceptive* (read Revelation 12:9, Matthew 24:4, 5, and 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4; 11:4, 13-15). Look up the term *deceive* and write down the complete definition. *That's* what we're dealing with in *sin*.

13. Romans 6:16 – How can you tell if you are the servant (slave) of something? If you sin, are you the *slave* of sin?

14. Verses 12, 13 – List two ways by which you can *avoid* being the slave of sin.

15. Verse 18 – How do you *maintain* your freedom from sin? Now go back and read the entire chapter to get the idea Paul is teaching.

16. Romans 8:5-8 – Read this very carefully and think about what Paul is saying. What are the *things of the flesh*? What does being *carnally minded* mean? Does it have to do with being *sensual*? What does *sensual* mean? Is such a mind obedient to God's rules of holy conduct?

17. Verse 9 – The *KJV* has a confusing translation of this verse. Let's use the *NIV* translation: "You, however, are not *controlled* by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ." Does the *flesh* ("sinful nature") *control* humans outside of Christ? Are those who are in Christ *controlled* by a different Spirit? Would that refer to a *Holy Spirit*?

18. Galatians 5:19-21 – List all of the ways the *sinful nature* (*KJV* = "works of the flesh") manifests itself. Can those who yield themselves to these things inherit the Kingdom of God? (See also 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10.) What must you change in order to please God?

The Unpardonable Sin

1. Matthew 12:31, 32 – Is there a sin for which you can *never* be forgiven? What is *blasphemy against the Holy Spirit*?

Comment: It's hard to imagine that you can commit all manner of sin and blasphemy – even against Jesus Christ – *and be forgiven*. But...if you *blaspheme against the Holy Spirit*, you can *never be forgiven*! What manner of sin is this?

The term *blasphemy* is from the Greek term *blasphemia* – which has to do with using malicious language intended to defame the reputation of someone, as well as to verbally abuse them. Still, why can you do this to *Jesus Christ* and be forgiven, but not the *Holy Spirit*? The problem is not so much the language used as it is the *heart and mind* that give utterance to it.

The context in which this is written shows that the Pharisees attributed Jesus' casting out of a demon to the work of Beelzebub (the demonic "Lord of the Flies"). Jesus called this a "kingdom divided against itself" and wondered aloud by whom some among the Pharisees cast out demons. Then He uttered the expression "If you are not with me, then you are against me." With that, He warned them about their slanderous remarks.

Sins against the Son could be attributed to a simple ignorance or misunderstanding. But, sins against the Holy Spirit were different. Jewish teaching of that time attributed to the Holy Spirit two functions: (a) as God's instrument of revelation, it brought *God's truth* to mankind; and (b) it enabled men to recognize and understand the truth when they saw it. Thus, the Holy Spirit is God's great power used to illuminate the mind of man about the truth of God's thoughts and ways (compare Isaiah 55:8-11 to 1 Corinthians 2:6-16). It should be obvious from this explanation that man *needs the Holy Spirit both to recognize and to understand God's truth*. What happens when someone constantly repudiates that revelation – and thinks so little of it as to consider it to be of little to no worth? To be openly disrespectful and disobedient toward it? Will he be converted by God's *revealed truth*? Let's explore that.

2. Genesis 2:16, 17 – What did the Lord God warn Adam against regarding the trees in the Garden? Does it appear that He was concerned with man's ability to handle all that is involved in dealing with good *and* evil? Why should He have been?

3. Genesis 3:1-7 – Were God's fears realized when Adam and Eve partook of the fruit of good and evil? What was to be their punishment?

Comment: This is reminiscent of a weak character in a book or movie who, in the face of great, overwhelming danger, says: “I can take care of myself!” Adam and Eve chose to believe that they could handle all of the attendant problems of trying to sort out good and evil in their lives. Little did they realize that they would have to experience the *consequences* of not getting it right. This is especially true when *evil* has the appearance of *good* and vice versa. At that point, it takes the mind of God to discern the truth of the matter. You can wrap evil with the appearance of good and present it with great emotion and charm, but it is still evil.

4. Isaiah 5:20 – What is the problem discussed here? Why do you suppose someone could confuse these things?

5. Read vv. 21-23 – What are some of the problems that arise from this confusion?

6. Judges 21:25 – What is the sad commentary about Israel during the times of the judges?

7. Proverbs 14:12 – What does this proverb warn you about? Would you need proper guidance to be able to tell the difference between the way that *seems* right and the way that *is* right?

8. Malachi 2:17 – What two things weary the Lord God? Does this also sound like people who are unable to discern good from evil?

9. Do you think that it is possible that the person who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit is one who would call God’s *truth* a lie – and religious *lies* the truth? Write down a clear explanation for your answer. Give yourself some examples.

10. Romans 1:18-25 – Why is God’s wrath revealed “...against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...”?

Comment: Paul’s expression “...hold the truth in unrighteousness...” is better translated “...hinder the Truth by their wickedness...” (*Moffatt*) or “...keep truth imprisoned in their wickedness...” (*The Jerusalem Bible*). The *KJV* in v. 25 says that they *changed* God’s truth into a lie; other translations say they *replaced* it with a lie. I prefer the *KJV* in this case because it is more in line with *calling good evil and evil good*. It shows a great disregard for God’s truth

to the point that one would pervert it to suit his own purposes (see Matthew 24:4, 5; 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15; Galatians 1:6-9; and 2 Peter 2).

11. Hebrews 6:4-8 – Consider carefully this description. Did such people at one time have the gift of the Holy Spirit? How can you tell? Does it appear that their *falling away* is *unpardonable*? Why? What is their punishment? How does this verse affect the famous “once saved, always saved” concept taught by many?

12. Hebrews 10:26 – In what way are these people similar to those in Hebrews 6:4-8? Is their sin *unpardonable*?

13. Ephesians 4:30; Acts 6:10; and 1 Thessalonians 5:19 – Define *grieve*, *resist*, and *quench*. Do you think that people who do such things (a) have a desire for a pardon and (b) even recognize the need for one? Is *repentance* possible if you do not desire it or recognize the need for it?

14. Isaiah 6:9, 10 – What assignment did God give to Isaiah regarding the Israelites?

15. Matthew 13:10-17 – Why did Jesus speak in parables? Was it to make His teachings easier to understand? Would His disciples understand while the others would not? Is this a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 6:9, 10?

16. Romans 11:7-36 – As a result of Isaiah’s prophecy, was most of Israel, in fact, *blinded* by God? Would they suffer punishment as a result of this *God-induced* blindness? Could they *repent* and be grafted back into the holy stump? (See v. 23.) Were they to be cast off *forever*? Why? (See v. 29.)

Comment: Here you see an awesome revelation from God! It appears that there are situations in which He prevents the commission of the unpardonable sin by *blinding* people to spiritual revelation and truth. They might even be *religious* people by *personal choice* – or, they might be professed agnostics and atheists. If those spiritually ignorant Israelites could be grafted back in, why couldn’t those non-Israelites who are spiritually blind be grafted in at a later time?

All of that considered, there are two types of people who can commit the unpardonable sin: (a) those to whom God has revealed much of His truth

in a effort to cause their repentance and (b) those who have repented, but who have cast off the truth God has revealed to them – grieving, resisting, and/or quenching the Holy Spirit. This sin is committed when the individual refuses to listen to God's guidance, turns his back upon God's urging, and prefers his own human ideas to the ideas God seeks to put into his mind and heart. When this happens, he reaches a point where he cannot even recognize God's truth if it slapped him in the face – even to the point that he would look upon God's goodness as evil and Satan's evil as good. And...like these Pharisees, he would even consider Jesus Christ to be a partner with the Devil. *When a man reaches that point, repentance is impossible.*

For this reason, it is doubtful that the person who *worries* about having committed such a sin has, in fact, committed it. There is too much guilt and conscience left for that to be the case – too much sense of having sinned. How can a man repent if he cannot recognize God's good – and desire it? How can he repent if he cannot understand the awful consequences of his sins – or even care that there are such consequences? According to Jesus Christ, this will also be true of those humans who are ruled over by Christ and His Saints during the 1,000-year Kingdom of God. *If they cannot repent, they cannot be forgiven.*

Properly Understanding Repentance

It is vital, then, that we get a biblical understanding of repentance. Isaiah 55:8, 9 tells us that God's thoughts and ways are higher than man's, so it would benefit us greatly to understand what *God* means when He says that we must *repent and believe the gospel* (Mark 1:15). Can we do one without the other? No...it's a package deal. It's not enough to repent without belief in the gospel of the Kingdom of God; it's not enough to believe in the gospel of the Kingdom without repenting of the things that would prevent you from entering it. Let's understand this thoroughly.

What follows is a brief description of eight types of sin from which we must be “saved” – of which we must repent. Remember, however, that we must repent of *all* sin – whether or not it is in this list:

1. *hamartia* (“a missing of the mark”) – the failure to be what we ought to be and can be;

failure to meet the divine standard (ex.: Romans 5:12, 21; 6:23);

2. *parabasis* (“a stepping across a line”) – deliberately overstepping God's law, the line that divides right from wrong (ex.: Romans 2:23; 5:14);
3. *paraptoma* (“slipping up”) – slipping up due to carelessness and unconcern (ex.: Romans 4:25; 5:15; Ephesians 2:1);
4. *anomia* (“lawlessness”) – deliberately breaking a law which we know exists and that we know we should obey (ex.: Romans 6:19);
5. *apheilema* (“a debt”) – the failure to pay to God the debts we owe Him – like love, loyalty, and obedience; to take something away from someone (ex.: Malachi 3:8-12; Luke 10:38-42);
6. *asebia* (“ungodliness”) – the most profoundly theological word for sin: irreverent; impious; wicked (ex.: Jude 15 – used 4x);
7. *adikia* (“wickedness”) – wickedness that arises from the perversion of worship (ex.: 1 John 5:17; Romans 1:29; 2:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12);
8. *parakoe* (“disobedience”) – disobedience caused by an unwillingness to listen/hear (ex.: Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 10:6).

How does God intend for this repentance to take place? What are the essential elements?

1. Acts 17:30 – Does God, in fact, *command* all people everywhere to repent?
2. Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Acts 2:38 – What do these three *beginnings* have in common?
3. Genesis 6:6; Exodus 32:12; 1 Samuel 15:11 – Compare these scriptures to Numbers 23:19 and James 1:17. With that information, what does it mean for *God* to repent? God is perfect in every way and not subject to error or sin. What would you suspect is the *difference in the meaning* of the term when it is applied to *man*? Look up the meaning of

repent in a dictionary and use the various definitions to frame your answer.

Comment: Here's a hint to help you in framing your answer: *pay attention to the part of the definition that says that it means* "to change one's mind; to show regret; to feel sorrow for something done." Can you regret that you did something – without that something being sinful? Keep in mind that man's need to repent *specifically* has to do with his sin.

4. Acts 2 – Read the entire chapter. Now, focus on v. 37 and determine what the first step in the repentance process is.

5. Acts 16 – Does this chapter support your answer from #4? What did the jailer ask?

6. Acts 7:58; 9:5; 22:20 – Do you think that Paul's previous *religious convictions and actions* were shown to be erroneous – even sinful?

7. Look up the definition for the term *convict* (use the definition for the *verb* form). What role does this term serve in *repentance*? Does it first and foremost involve a *consciousness of guilt*? Could you sincerely *repent* if you had no *consciousness of guilt* – no matter how *good* you might otherwise be?

8. 2 Corinthians 7:10 – What is the difference between *godly sorrow* and *worldly sorrow*? Is it based on the difference between *admitting personal wrongdoing* and *expressing sorrow for getting caught*? What does Paul mean when he says that godly sorrow is "...a repentance not to be repented of..."? Use your dictionary meanings in writing your answer.

9. Romans 10:9, 10 – What do you think is involved in *confessing with your mouth* the Lord Jesus and *believing in your heart* that God raised Him from the dead? Are you, in the process, *confessing* your sins and asking for forgiveness? Explain the reason for your answer.

Comment: Notice that the confession is made "...unto salvation" – in other words, it will lead to salvation.

10. Daniel 9:4-19 – Write down the things which Daniel *confesses* as he seeks to understand God's word and live by it.

11. Proverbs 28:13 – What is the difference between *covering* your sins and *confessing* your sins? What must you do in addition to *confessing* your sins? Is that what is meant by the term *repentance*?

12. James 5:16 – What does James mean when he tells us to confess our *paraptomas* to one another? How is that helpful to your repentance? What else does he consider to be helpful to the repentance process?

Comment: I would not recommend widely broadcasting your *careless or intentional slip-ups* to others – even in a church setting. I do not think James intends for that to be the practice. It would make sense that you be able to confess to another person sins that you have committed against him or her. In doing so, you remove barriers that prevent you from loving him/her as yourself.

Notice another part of this process in Matthew 6:12: "Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us." Confession must be made both to God and our fellowman in order to remove barriers that impede our forgiveness. Jesus tells us to ask God the Father to forgive us in measure to the degree we forgive those who have sinned against us.

Generally broadcasting our sins to others can do infinitely more harm than good. Matthew 5:23, 24 tells us to be reconciled with our brother before making our offerings to God. The Apostle John asks a compelling question: "If a man says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. *How can a man love God – whom he has not seen – if he hates his brother – whom he has seen?*" (1 John 4:20).

13. Matthew 18:15-17 – What are the steps you should take if someone sins against *you*? Is your first step to make a *public display* of it – or to do this *privately*? Why is this first step helpful? Should it be undertaken with *anger* and *loud accusation*? Could you *pray together* if there were anger and rancor? Does this process sound anything like what James might have had in mind?

14. Romans 6:2 – What does it mean to be *dead to sin*? Does it mean the same as Romans 8:13 – that is, to *mortify* the deeds of the body (the *flesh*)?

Comment: Only in Romans 8:13 and Colossians 3:5 is the term *mortify* used in scripture. But...in each place a different Greek term is used. In Romans 8:13, it is *thanatoo*, which means "to kill; to

cause to be put to death” – in essence, to extirpate, exterminate, eradicate, uproot, to cut out by surgery. In Colossians 3:5, it is *nekroo*, which means “to deaden; to subdue” – in essence, to make it impotent to the point that it is *totally* powerless. You should get the idea that this means to turn from sin with an attitude of finality.

True repentance is not merely changing your mind, being sorry for your sins, mere reformation of your life, or simply confessing your sin. It is to set your mind and heart on accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Master of your life to the point that you determine to never again allow sin to dominate you – if possible, totally eradicating it from your life in order to be like Him. This is very difficult without the aid of God’s Holy Spirit, so you must be prepared to constantly audit your life to discover sinful behavior that needs to be dealt with in this manner.

15. Would you agree or disagree with Lewis (p. 2) about whether or not God *demands* repentance before He will take you back? Why/why not?

Comment: Read the following scriptures to help you with your answer: Acts 17:30; Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Mark 6:12; Acts 2:38; 20:21.

16. Luke 24:47 – Just before He left, what did Jesus instruct His disciples to preach? To how much of the earth were they to preach this? Comparing this scripture to Matthew 4:17, do you think that Jesus was consistent throughout His ministry of 3+ years in preaching that we must repent of our sins? Is repentance *necessary* in order to be put right with God?

17. Ezekiel 18:4, 20 – What is the alternative to repentance? How does this death compare to the one mentioned in Hebrews 9:27? How about the one in Genesis 2:17?

Comment: You must understand that *physical death* is part of being a human being. Regardless of the relative merits of our lives, we’re all going to die a physical death. The thing with which we must be concerned is that *judgment* that comes afterward. Matthew 25:41 demonstrates that the death spoken of in Ezekiel 18 and Genesis 2:17 is a death from which you cannot be recovered. Revelation 20:6 calls this death the *second death*. We will discuss this more fully in Lesson 10 when we study about the resurrection(s) from the dead.

18. What is the *remission of sins* that comes as a result of our repentance? (The term *remission* is from the term *remit* – look it up.) Is God *obligated* to remit your sins – or is that remission something that you really do not deserve? (Also read Acts 3:19 to get the idea of *remission*.)

19. Psalm 103:8-18 – Write down some things David uses in these verses to describe God’s character and attitude. What is meant by the terms *merciful* and *gracious*? Describe His attitude toward man. Has He given us what we deserve? How far does He remove our sins from us? What does He expect from us in return for His mercy and grace?

20. 2 Peter 3:9 – Write out a good explanation of this verse – paying attention to terms like *slack* and *longsuffering*. What does this verse mean to you relative to *repentance*?

Further Discussion of Varied Aspects of Repentance

Some scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus why He associated with publicans and sinners. His answer was simple: “They that are whole do not need a physician; those who are ill do. I did not come to call the *righteous* to repentance; I came to call the *sinners*” (Luke 5:30, 31). In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul explained how sin has infected the human family in its various forms – and came to this conclusion: “...*All* have sinned, and come short of the glory of God...” (Romans 3:23). Sin, therefore, is universal.

What have we done? We have failed to meet the divine standard and allowed our self-will to intrude into the sphere of divine authority – insulting God’s divine truth (notice, too, v. 20 says that we understand what sin is *through the law*). Romans 3:9 says that both Jews and Gentiles are under sin. John says: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us....If we say that we have not sinned, we make [God] a liar, and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:8, 10).

1. Psalm 38 – What is the point of David’s prayer? How does he express shame and guilt for his sins? Is he aware of enemies who might use knowledge of his sins to try to make him ineffective as a servant of God? Based on v. 18, what do you think he intends to do?

2. Read 2 Samuel 11 through 12:23 and Psalm 51 – David committed murder in order to take Bathsheba as his wife. The child they conceived died as an act of God’s judgment against them. Describe the emotions of David as he pours out his heart to God for forgiveness. What does he ask God to do in order to heal the situation? Find other examples of prayers of repentance and note their contents and requests made of God.

3. 2 Corinthians 7:9-11 – Paul had rebuked the Corinthians for allowing abominable behavior to go on in their congregation (read 1 Corinthians 5). His rebuke evidently brought about true repentance among them. What does Paul mean that they “...sorrowed to repentance...after a *godly* manner...”? What effects does *godly sorrow* produce in us (v. 11 – there are 7 of them)? Write an explanation of each one – try to show how each helps to keep you from repeating the sin you’re confessing to God. Would you agree that there is something special about *godly sorrow*?

4. Matthew 3:8, 9 – What do you think John the Baptist meant by telling the Pharisees and Sadducees that they were to “...bring forth...fruits meet for repentance”? Should you think that your family relationships and friendships are sufficient to get you into God’s favor?

5. Jonah 3 – God sent Jonah to Nineveh to declare to them God’s judgment of their imminent destruction. What did the people of Nineveh do in the face of that destruction? What was the King’s reasoning in the face of such a *sure* event (v. 9)? What did God do as a result of their actions? Does this demonstrate that God *might* change His mind about prophesied events of destruction if enough people take *repentance* seriously?

6. Romans 2:4 – Explain how God *leads* us to repentance through His *goodness*. What kinds of things would He do to get us to realize our need to repent? Would lessons like this be used by God to do so?

7. Romans 10:3, 8-17 – What prevents people from repenting? How do they get knowledge of God’s righteousness? Does everyone willingly obey it – even after being shown its truth?

8. 2 Timothy 2:15-26 – List several things a person should do as part of his/her repentance (example: correctly study the scriptures - v. 15). State a benefit to be derived from doing each one. Note v. 25. Does it appear that repentance is something that God gives to an individual who is willingly obedient? Does this suggest that you have to have God’s help in order to be repentant? ***Do you now properly understand the concept of repentance?***

Some Final Thoughts

In 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20, Paul emphasizes the *cost* of retrieving man from the consequences of sin. The emphasis is on *a purchase that changes the ownership – the true believer becomes God’s property through Jesus Christ*. In 1 Corinthians 7:22, 23, he says that those called of Jesus Christ are to be *servants*, who are *freemen* – someone with all the rights and privileges of citizenship (in God’s Kingdom). They are not to allow themselves to become the servants (slaves – Romans 6:11-23) of men in the future. Having been redeemed from the curse of the law – that is, from the death from which there is no recovery – we must think and act more like God (Galatians 3:13). But...notice what Paul says God ultimately does with our *servant* status (Galatians 4:4-7; see also John 15:13-15). It is a great honor to be called the *friend* of Jesus Christ and the *son* of God!

Man has to be redeemed through Jesus Christ out of the state of sin into which he has fallen. That sinful state is a slavery from which man cannot escape by his own power. He must have the intervention of Christ in order to do so.

That redemption requires the payment of a price. *If man paid his own price, then all of mankind would be brought to death, and God’s plan to create man in His image would come to nothing.* Instead of man paying his own price, Elohim devised the plan whereby the Redeemer would be provided – whereby Christ would become a substitute for sinful mankind.

The resultant state of the true believer is a *paradox: something that seems wrong, but is actually right*. We are redeemed to freedom...but, this freedom means *slavery to God*. True believers are redeemed to do the will of their Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. Repentance and forgiveness imply deliverance from the second death – not necessarily the

built-in consequences of the sins themselves. In other words, you can be forgiven for being a robber, but you should not expect God's forgiveness to be a "get-out-of-jail card."

With that in mind, learn to focus on three important qualities of God: (1) There is no question about the moral standards which God's will imposes – they are not based on whim and fancy; (2) There is no doubt left about why He gets angry with mankind; and (3) God's anger is not removed except through the intervention of Jesus Christ and the subsequent changes made in the sinner's life to be more in line with God's thoughts and ways. In a world without *a supreme moral will* (God's), there would be no difference between good and evil. When each individual is allowed to do what is right in his own sight, you destroy the possibility of *a supreme moral will*. *That* is the essence of what Adam and Eve did in eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil.

The psychology of this is quite simple when you think about it. Men find it difficult to prostrate themselves before God because they are either unwilling or too proud to admit that they are at the end of their resources for a remedy. What does that mean? It means that we cannot ask for divine assistance unless we *truly believe* that we cannot do without it. We cannot invoke God unless we share with Him the spiritual awareness of the human weakness from which our problems arise. We cannot be truly repentant unless we believe that: (a) the penalty for sin *must* be paid; (b) our sins merit God's sentence of *death*; and (c) we will surely die if we do not change.

L. Morris, in his book *The Apostolic Preaching*, says this: "Unless we give *real* content to the wrath of God, unless we hold that men *really* deserve to have God visit upon them the painful consequences of their wrongdoing, *we empty God's forgiveness of its meaning*" (p. 185; emphasis added). In other words, how thankful would you be for God's forgiveness if you thought He really wouldn't let you die and the memory of you be forgotten *forever*? Would you be concerned about repenting if you felt that God did not *demand* it of you – and was not willing to severely punish you if you did not do it? In Galatians 6:7, Paul ascribes the consequences of our sins to a personal God who refuses to be mocked by our wrongdoing. May God give you eyes to see and ears to hear His truth in this matter.

an open letter from (continued from p. 1)

The Pastor

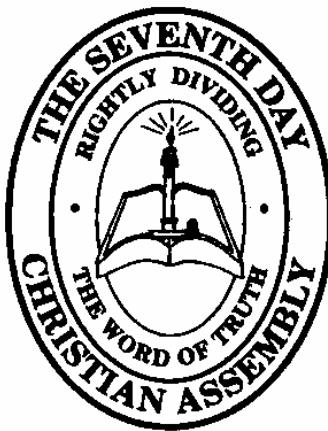
"...cannot be pictured, it can only be expressed mathematically" (p. 58). What Lewis fails to mention is this: a formula is a generalized statement intended to express some fundamental truth; it is, so to speak, a type of *summary* of that truth in its most basic form. *Repent* is not a *theory* in the sense of representing a general principle explaining observed facts *seemingly* worthy of belief. *Repent* is a *summary* that expresses a set of actions that *must take place* in order for God to understand whether or not the *process* (the changing of heart and mind that is supposed to take place in those who claim that they want to be holy as God is holy) is, in fact, taking place. When one begins to *explain* the contents of that *summary*, then one begins to use other expressions like "to show regret," "to turn from sin," "to resolve to reform one's life," and so on. Once you begin to *unfold the summary* in your life by the action you take, then you also begin to *unfold the description of the process* that you are undertaking in order to receive God's attention for becoming more like Him and receiving the *salvation* from sin and eternal death you need in order to enter eternal life after death.

I agree with Lewis that the term is a picture of the thing, not the thing itself. But, I am amazed that Lewis got so hung up on explaining his concept of the mechanics of the theory and picture that he missed the point entirely. You cannot merely set aside what he calls the *theory of repent* if you do not think it helps you. You might compare the given *description* to what the Bible actually *says* in order to follow it or kiss it off. But, you cannot set aside *God's demand*, based on *God's revealed description*, if it does not suit you. You must, indeed, understand the fundamental truth involved in it and *do it*. H₂O and 2 x 3 are as much about *doing* something as they are about *representing* something! So are *stop* and *repent*. What follows, then, in this lesson is the *unfolding of that summary* with more terms and pictures so you can know what you have to *do* as part of the repentance process. May the God of Truth bless your understanding as you study this lesson.

In Christ's Service,

Larry E. Ford, Pastor

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Straight Talk . . . Plain Truth

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