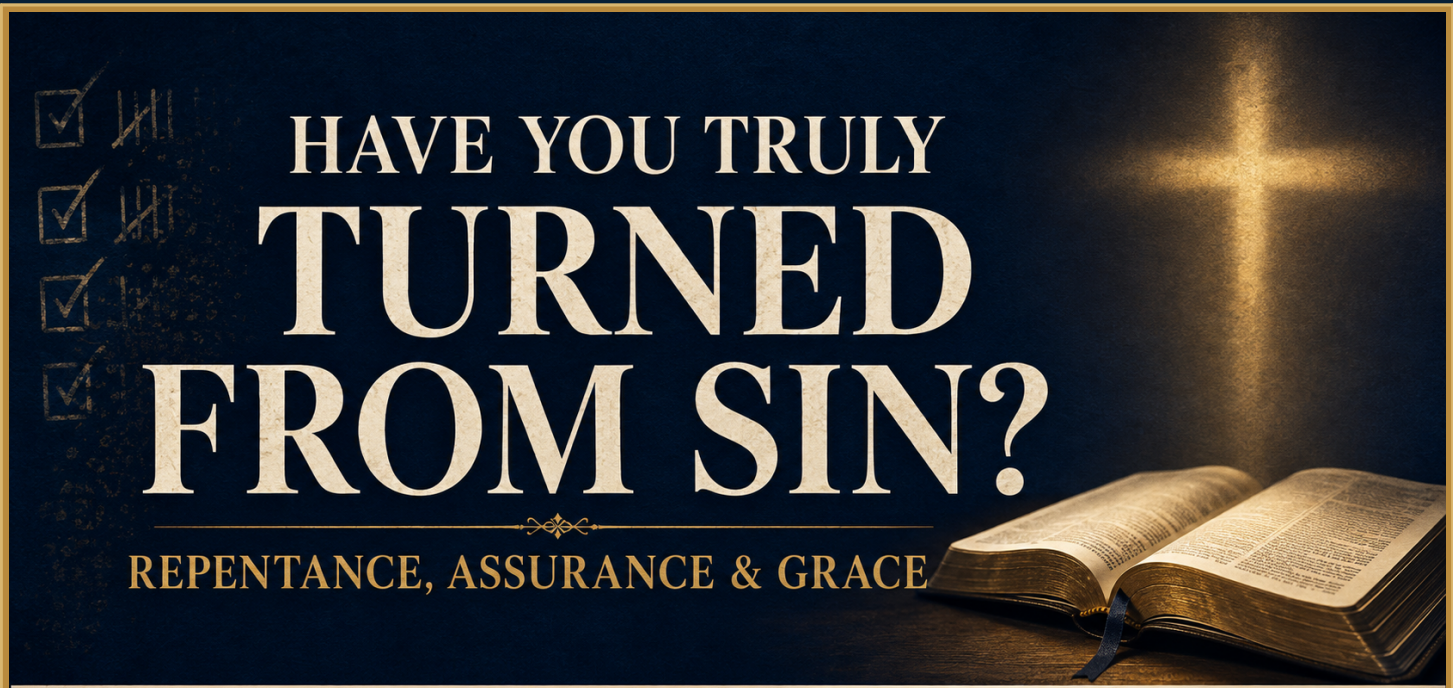




HAVE YOU TRULY TURNED FROM SIN?

REPENTANCE, ASSURANCE & GRACE

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REDEEMER CHURCH OF PIKETON, OHIO

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Repentance, Assurance, and the Grace of God in Christ

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Have You Truly Turned from Sin?

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BY PASTOR JASON K. BOOTHE

Who among us can honestly claim to have “turned from sin”? Yet it is all too common to hear Reformed and Calvinistic preachers present “turning from sin,” or even “fully repenting of sin,” as either a condition of salvation or the necessary proof that salvation has truly occurred. Several well-known preachers who will remain nameless in this article have made quite the reputation for themselves through “hard preaching” and “shocking messages to the youth.” The phrase “repent of sin” is frequently employed as a spiritual litmus test by which a person’s standing before God is judged. But no living Christian has turned from sin in any complete or final sense. Sin remains present in our thoughts, affections, words, and deeds. To claim otherwise is either to deny the continuing reality of indwelling sin or to reduce the holy demands of God’s law until our imperfect conduct can appear to satisfy them. In short, if “turning from sin” means actually ceasing from sin, then no one in this life has accomplished it, and no honest soul can find assurance there.

1 JOHN 1:8-10

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

JAMES 2:10

“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”

By the grace of God, I have repented of dead works. Through the Gospel, God has changed my mind concerning righteousness. As an unsaved soul, I once imagined that righteousness could be established through personal obedience, religious effort, or the works of the law. After all, I assumed I was just as good as the next guy! I have been brought to see that Christ alone is my righteousness before God. I have repented of every hope that I could justify myself in His sight. This repentance is itself a gracious gift of God, granted through the Gospel.

HEBREWS 6:1

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.”

ROMANS 3:19-24

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

PHILIPPIANS 3:8-9

"Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

2 TIMOTHY 2:25

"In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth."

Yet I continue to battle sinful inclinations and actual sins every day. As I grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, I become increasingly aware of the depth of my corruption and the infinite reach of God's grace in Christ. I cannot claim that I have turned from sin in the sense that sin no longer rises within me or appears in my thoughts, words, and deeds. Such a claim would require me either to deny the truth about myself or to redefine sin until my own conduct appeared acceptable.

ROMANS 7:18-25

"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.

For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:

But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

The assumption that a Christian has truly "turned from sin," if by that phrase we mean a decisive and measurable departure from all sinful behavior, places assurance upon an unstable foundation. The believer is then compelled to examine his performance continually and ask whether his repentance was sincere enough, complete enough, or lasting enough. Every failure produces another crisis. Every recurring temptation raises fresh doubts. Every fall into sin seems to call one's entire relationship with God into question.

GALATIANS 3:10-13

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."

PSALM 130:3-4

"If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."

This creates a miserable cycle of self-examination, temporary confidence, failure, and despair. Assurance rises when personal conduct appears commendable and collapses when sin becomes painfully evident. The Christian begins to measure God's favor by the perceived quality of his own

obedience instead of resting in the finished work of Christ. In practice, the soul is directed away from the Savior and back toward itself.

HEBREWS 6:18-20

“That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”

Scripture gives us a far better foundation. Our peace with God rests upon Christ’s obedience, Christ’s sacrifice, and Christ’s righteousness freely imputed to everyone who believes. The evidence of grace is not that the believer can claim freedom from every sin, but that he has been driven away from confidence in himself and caused to flee continually to Christ.

ROMANS 5:1-2

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

ROMANS 4:5-8

“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,

Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.”

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

Therefore, I cannot and will not testify that I have ceased from sin. I can gleefully testify that God has turned me from dead works to serve the living God! I can testify that He has stripped me of every hope of self-justification and clothed me in the perfect righteousness of His Son. I can testify that my hope rests in the risen Christ, who is able to keep me from falling and to present me faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

HEBREWS 9:13-14

“For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

JUDE 24-25

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”

My confidence before God is not that I have successfully turned from every sin. My confidence is that Christ has turned away every charge that could condemn me. He has borne my sins, satisfied divine justice, and become my everlasting righteousness. Therefore, even as I mourn my sins and seek to walk in obedience, I rest entirely in the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

ROMANS 8:33-34

“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth.

Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

1 PETER 2:24

“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.”

About the Author

Pastor Jason K. Boothe has served as senior pastor of Redeemer Church of Piketon, Ohio, since 2001. He has devoted more than thirty years to pastoral ministry and Gospel preaching in southern Ohio. His teaching and writing emphasize God’s free and sovereign grace, the finished work of Jesus Christ, and the believer’s assurance in the righteousness of Christ alone. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in U.S. History from Shawnee State University, a Master of Education from Grand Canyon University, and a Doctor of Theology from Andersonville Theological Seminary. Pastor Boothe and his wife, Kathryn, continue to serve the congregation and community through preaching, outreach, hospitality, and theological education.



Learn More About the Gospel

The good news of salvation rests in Christ's finished work, not human merit. Visit www.RedeemerPiketon.org to learn more about the Gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ, access sermons and articles, and find information about Redeemer Church of Piketon, Ohio.

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