

REPENTANCE FOUND? THE CONCEPT OF REPENTANCE IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

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Advocates of No-Lordship theology often claim that since the terms “repent” and “repentance” are not found John’s Gospel this means that repentance is not required for a sinner to be saved. Yet such a view does not rightly consider that lack of a specific term does not mean that the concept is absent. A close look at the Fourth Gospel reveals that this Gospel does teach that repentance is a part of saving faith and without it salvation cannot occur.

Introduction

According to some, repentance is merely a change of mind whereby a person recognizes his sinfulness and need of salvation. Therefore, an alcoholic should not be told that he needs to change his lifestyle, or even be willing to do so in order to obtain salvation. The only form of repentance that is required for eternal salvation is a change of mind about Christ. The idea that repentance means, “to turn from sins for salvation” amounts to salvation by works. If people need to turn from their sins in order to obtain salvation, then no one would have eternal life! Not only is this view a distortion of the Gospel, but also it completely undermines assurance. Therefore, while repentance is *not* a condition for receiving eternal life, it *is* a condition for possessing eternal life and enjoying the quality of life that comes with it.¹

¹ Each sentence is taken, in order, from the following sources: Robert N. Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 1: The Doctrine of Repentance in Church History,” *JEGS* 1, No. 1 (1988): 16. *Ibid.*, 18. Robert N. Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 3: New Testament Repentance: Lexical Considerations,” *JEGS* 2, No. 2 (1989): 18–19. Robert N. Wilkin, “Part 6: How to Communicate the Doctrine of Repentance Clearly,” *JEGS* 4, No. 1 (1991): 16, 17. David R. Anderson, “Repentance is for All Men,” *JEGS* 11, No. 20 (1998): 20.

These are the teachings of certain evangelical groups. But none of these beliefs find agreement with the position being defended in this current study. One of the pieces of evidence that these groups often mention is the absence of repentance in the Fourth Gospel. Wilkin invites those who are studying the doctrine of repentance to read the Fourth Gospel to “(d)iscover what, if anything, John tells us about the role of repentance in salvation.”² That is the challenge this article examines.³

Methodology for Word/Concept Studies

There are two ways, according to Cotterell and Turner, in which linguistics can assist in exegesis: (1) linguistics can add further precision to the meaning of a word; (2) linguistics can increase the ways to analyze a text.⁴ When studying any concept, one naturally begins by examining all texts containing that concept. While this a good *start*, it is not acceptable to end there. Contexts where the concept is present (where the word is absent) need to be studied as well. Consideration needs to be given to related words or phrases and the clusters in which those occur.

When studying repentance in the Fourth Gospel, one quickly realizes that the first step, studying occurrences of the word in its context, cannot be done. Neither μετανοέω nor μετάνοια occurs in the Fourth Gospel.⁵ This does not necessitate the conclusion that the concept of repentance does not occur. However, it does allow for this possibility after, but only after the Fourth Gospel has been carefully read and found not to contain it.

The Meaning of Repentance

The meaning of the word needs to be decided upon before endeavoring to see if the Fourth Gospel contains the concept of repentance. Therefore, an evaluation of several significant passages containing either μετανοέω or μετάνοια will occur to derive a meaning for repentance.⁶ Then a decision will be reached as to whether the Fourth Gospel contains this concept.

² Wilkin, “Part 6,” 14.

³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947–48), 3:376–77, says that since repentance is missing from the Fourth Gospel and Romans, “No thoughtful person would attempt to defend such a notion against such odds, and those who have thus undertaken doubtless have done so without weighing the evidence or considering the untenable position which they assume.” Also, note that John MacArthur has responded specifically on this issue. See www.sfpulpit.com/2006/10/26/repentance-in-the-gospel-of-john. (Accessed January 22, 2013).

⁴ See Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 27–28.

⁵ Neither does either occur in 1–3 John. While μετάνοια does not occur in Revelation, μετανοέω occurs ten times: Rev 2:5, 16, 21, 22; 3:3, 19; 9:20, 21; 16:9, 11.

⁶ Some of the attempts and pitfalls associated with utilizing the etymology of this word for ascertaining a definition will be mentioned.

Μετάνοια and *Μετανοέω* in the New Testament

Matthew 3:2 provides the beginning cry of the ministry of John the Baptist: “Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is near.” His first word was the command (μετανοείτε) to repent. Similarly, in Mark 1:15, Jesus’ first words in the Gospel are: “The time has been fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Jesus’ first words include the idea of repenting and believing, and His first command is to repent (μετανοείτε). In Matt 4:17, after Jesus had been baptized by John the Baptist and tempted in the wilderness, He began his public preaching ministry with these words: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” Again, repentance is prominent in both Jesus’ and John’s ministries.

One significant passage for determining the meaning of repentance in the New Testament is Matt 3:7–9. The Pharisees and Sadducees came to the place where⁷ John was baptizing. Upon seeing these religious leaders, John scolds them saying: “You brood⁸ of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath about to come? Therefore, bear fruit worthy of repentance.” This final phrase, “bear fruit worthy of repentance,” is significant enough for us to take a closer look.

First, John is not actually declaring that they in fact are fleeing from the wrath to come; it is sarcasm.⁹ This can be seen in that he just referred to them as the “offspring” or “brood of vipers,” a negative reference to their character.¹⁰ By first pointing out their poor character and then calling for fruit worthy of repentance before they would be allowed to be baptized, John is asking for “concrete evidence of repentance.”¹¹ What does concrete evidence of repentance look like? When someone has repented, it will be demonstrated in their lifestyle and behavior; it will flow from a heart that has been changed.¹² Regarding “fruit,” Newman and Stine correctly note that it is a general term, referring to what grows out of a heart that

⁷ Note that the NASB, NLT, and NRSV say that they came to be baptized, but ἐπί here most likely refers to the place where baptism was taking place, as the NIV (NKJV?) has it. So Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary 22 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 77; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, Word Biblical Commentary 33A (Dallas: Word, 1993), 49. While D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:103, raises this point, he is less sure than Blomberg and Hagner. Contra Barclay M. Newman and Philip C. Stine, *A Translator’s Handbook on The Gospel of Matthew*, Helps for Translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 66, who unequivocally declare this phrase to mean that they came to be baptized, giving five different ways to translate it with that meaning.

⁸ The Greek word γεννήματα refers primarily to offspring, and when in reference to snakes or vipers, to “brood.”

⁹ So Blomberg, *Matthew*, 78; Carson, “Matthew,” 103.

¹⁰ Newman and Stine, *A Translator’s Handbook on The Gospel of Matthew*, 66, say it refers to them being “clever and wicked deceivers, hypocrites who lead people astray.”

¹¹ Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 50. Hagner also mentions that “(r)epentance and good works are very frequently associated in rabbinic thought (see Str–B 1:170–72)” (ibid). Note that Charles C. Bing, “Why Lordship Faith Misses the Mark for Salvation,” *JEGS* 12, No. 22 (1999): 27, criticizes the idea of looking at fruit. However, that is exactly what John the Baptist does: he looks and finds the Pharisees and Sadducees’ fruit wanting.

¹² Blomberg, *Matthew*, 78.

has been changed.¹³ Kümmel said, “Only he who produces such fruit shows thereby that he *is* converted.”¹⁴ In order to escape the coming wrath the repentance needs to be genuine; it will be reflected by their entire lifestyle¹⁵ being “in harmony with ... oral repentance.”¹⁶ Blomberg said, “without the evidence of a changed life and perseverance in belief, all such grounds of trust prove futile.”¹⁷ Tannehill (commenting on the parallel verse in Luke 3:8) incisively concludes: “The reference to ‘fruits’ and ‘deeds’ make clear that this is an ethically transforming event, one that results in changed behavior. In 3:9, John the Baptist warns them not to rely upon their ancestry; they must produce good works (fruit) to demonstrate that they have repented.”¹⁸ Therefore, there exists a connection between repentance and the evidence of it: good fruit.¹⁹

As mentioned above, Jesus’ initial proclamation in Mark’s Gospel contained the dual imperatives of repentance and believing. He said that the *καιρός* has been fulfilled, a term which he used to refer to the idea that the decisive moment had arrived.²⁰ This twofold description, involving repentance and belief,²¹ is similar to Acts 20:21, and denotes the basis for discipleship in the Synoptic Gospels. Both the verbs, and their noun forms, occur frequently in the New Testament. Regarding Jesus’ call to believe in the gospel, it means “not only an intellectual acceptance that the ‘news’ is true, but a response of acceptance and commitment.”²²

This narrative is paradigmatic for the entire Gospel. Every time Jesus is described as teaching or preaching, the desired response is faith and repentance; every time the mystery of the kingdom is discussed, it is to be viewed through the

¹³ Newman and Stine, *A Translator's Handbook on The Gospel of Matthew*, 67. Arthur W. Pink, *Repentance: What Saith the Scriptures?* (Swengel, PA: Reiner Publications, 1967), 28–29, lists six genuine fruits of repentance: (1) hatred of sin; (2) deep sorrow for sin; (3) confessing sins; (4) turning from sin; (5) restitution; (6) permanence (all five above must last). He clarifies “permanence” by saying that repentance is never perfected, but is a life-long, daily act (30).

¹⁴ Werner Georg Kümmel, *The Theology of the New Testament: According to Its Major Witnesses Jesus-Paul-John* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), 29.

¹⁵ Interestingly, the Geneva version of the New Testament rendered the word *μετάνοια* here “Amend your lyves.” William Douglas Chamberlain, *The Meaning of Repentance* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1943), 38.

¹⁶ Carson, “Matthew,” 103.

¹⁷ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 78.

¹⁸ Pink, *Repentance*, 10–12, lists a few “false signs” (or false fruits) of repentance, which are not evidences *by themselves*: (1) trembling under preaching; (2) being almost persuaded; (3) humbling ourselves to God; (4) confessing sins; (5) good works that appear to demonstrate repentance without a changed heart and mind.

¹⁹ It is nearly inconceivable that Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 3,” 13–21, never dealt with the phrase “fruit worthy of repentance” in his articles. His dissertation was not reviewed which may or may not contain an explanation of this phrase.

²⁰ See R. T. France, *Mark*, NIGCNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 91.

²¹ Note that Robert N. Wilkin, “Part 4: New Testament Repentance: Repentance in the Gospels and Acts,” *JEGS* 3, No. 1 (1990): 22, proposes that the *καί* might be used ascensively, meaning “that is.” Therefore, “Repent, that is, believe in the gospel.” The problem is that how do you “repent in the gospel.” He fails to wrestle with this. Wilkin proposes this as simply a possibility.

²² France, *Mark*, 94.

eyes of repentance and faith.²³ For example, when the Twelve were sent out (6:7–13), their message was for all to repent (6:12); faith is not mentioned, but implicitly included.²⁴

There are a few points that need comment. First, the message of John the Baptist and Jesus can be seen to have continuity in the call to repent; they can be distinguished by Jesus' additional command to believe. While it may be possible to see faith implicitly included in John's preaching on repentance,²⁵ it explicitly emerges in Jesus' ministry. What is the best way to view the relationship between repentance and faith in Mark 1:15? They are inseparable;²⁶ repentance is a beginning part of conversion;²⁷ faith is the overarching term. Pink said it well: "Repentance is the heart's acknowledgement of the justice of God's sentence of condemnation; faith is the heart's acceptance of the grace and mercy which are extended to us through Christ."²⁸

They can be seen as inseparable or overlapping in that the call to either is a call to both (e.g. Mark 6:12). John the Baptist's preaching was to prepare the way for Jesus' ministry, which among other things, included the initial preaching of repentance to prepare for Jesus' call to believe. Faith is therefore the larger term; it includes repentance though they can be semantically distinguished. Repentance must lead to faith; faith cannot exist without repentance.

Jesus' description of the Ninevites in Matt 12:41 includes that they "repented at the preaching of Jonah." Jesus uses μετανοέω to describe their actions; what does the book of Jonah say? "Then the people of Nineveh believed²⁹ in God" (Jon 3:5). This belief was demonstrated by a call for a fast and putting on sackcloth (3:6) and ashes (3:7), followed by a declaration of the king for people to *turn*³⁰ from their wicked ways. Therefore, what Jesus calls "repenting," the book of Jonah describes

²³ Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 38–39.

²⁴ See *ibid.*, 40ff. See also A. Boyd Luter, Jr., "Repentance," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:673. For the following discussion see Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 50–52.

²⁵ The question then arises as to the "who" to believe in and the "what" to believe that John would have been calling people to. In Mark's Gospel, "we are justified in assuming the presence of repentance where faith is active in the story, and it's want where unbelief is encountered." Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, 52.

²⁶ See Paul Helm, "Repentance," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 1837. Walter Chantry, *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1970), 57, calls them "Siamese twins." Michael Horton, ed., *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 223, n16, agrees about their being inseparable, and helpfully adds that referring to them as synonyms would be inappropriate: inseparable, but distinct.

²⁷ Repentance should not be considered to occur prior to faith, however. See David R. Anderson, "Repentance is for All Men," *JEGS* 11, No. 20 (1998): 10; Horton, *Christ the Lord*, 30–43. Though Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:375, understands this issue quite differently from the position defended in this paper, he shows the faults with viewing repentance as following believing. See also Lewis Sperry Chafer, "The Terms of Salvation," *JEGS* 1, No. 1 (1988): 37–39.

²⁸ Pink, *Repentance*, 13.

²⁹ Translated in the LXX with ἐμπιστεύω, from the Hebrew word אָמַן.

³⁰ Not rendered in the LXX with μετανοέω, but by ἀποστρέφω from the Hebrew word שׁוּב.

as believing and turning. This provides more evidence that Jesus' use of μετανοέω includes more than a change of mind, but includes a turning and relates to believing.³¹

The relationship between repentance and believing continues to be developed in Acts of the Apostles. For example, while 3:19 says “repent and return (ἐπιστρέφω), so that your sins may be wiped away,”³² 11:21 says, “a large number who believed turned (ἐπιστρέφω) to the Lord.” From this, it can be concluded that repenting and turning are related (3:19) and believing and turning are related (11:21). Those verses (especially 3:19) combined with 10:43 (“everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins”) shows that repentance, believing, and turning are all related to each other and to forgiveness of sins. Therefore, repentance is understood as “turning” or “changing” in a salvific context.

The order and description in 20:20 is helpful to understand this. Paul says that he testified to both Jews and Greeks “of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” This text proves to be exegetically problematic. Wallace concludes that “saving faith *includes* repentance ... Luke envisions repentance as the inceptive act of which the entirety may be called πίστις. Thus, for Luke, conversion is not a two-step process, but one step, faith—but the kind of faith that *includes* repentance.”³³ Bock defines it as “a turning in direction . . . to make a conscious turn toward God and God's actions through Jesus.”³⁴ Finally, Paul describes his ministry as calling people to “repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance” (26:20).³⁵ Here the term “repent” should be viewed as the initial act of coming to faith;³⁶ it contains the idea of turning and will produce good deeds³⁷ which demonstrate that the repentance was genuine, not merely sorrow, conviction, shame, guilt, or grief.³⁸ “Repentance” stresses the need for a change in direction, “turning” conveys a changing of direction with the result

³¹ This linking and interdependence of believing and repenting can also be seen in Luke 5:32: “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” The idea of turning can also be seen in Luke 17:4: “And if he sins against you seven times a day and seven times returns to you saying, ‘I repent,’ (then) forgive him.”

³² Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 175, concludes that while repentance in Acts 3:19 “stresses the need for a change in direction,” turning “also makes this point and highlights the process of ending up in line with God.”

³³ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 289.

³⁴ Bock, *Acts*, 141.

³⁵ Similarly, 2 Pet 3:9 says that the opposite of people perishing is that they come to repentance. This is in a salvific context and should be considered the first act of believing by turning away from sins and to God.

³⁶ Cf. Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper, 1958), 33. Similarly, Bock, *Acts*, 142, says, “repentance stresses the starting point of the need for forgiveness whereas faith is the resulting trust and understanding that this forgiveness comes from God.”

³⁷ Luter, “Repentance,” 673, mentions that Acts 26:20 with Luke 3:8 (“bear fruits in keeping with repentance”) essentially proves that a changed life *is* the “expected” result of repentance. Cf. Frederick C. Grant, *An Introduction to New Testament Thought* (New York: Abingdon, 1950), 309.

³⁸ More on the distinction between μετανοέω and μεταμέλομαι is said below.

of being in line with God, and faith is the result of repenting and turning, that is, trusting in God.

Μετανοέω and Μεταμέλομαι

While μετανοέω and μετάνοια are frequent in the New Testament, μεταμέλομαι is not; it occurs only six times.³⁹ Wilkin is correct when he says, “there are no uses of *metamelomai* in the New Testament where ‘repentance’ is a good translation. It always refers to regret, remorse, or to a change of mind. It never refers to turning from one’s sins.”⁴⁰ In fact, only one scholar could be located who referred to these terms as synonymous, but all the rest saw some level of distinction between them.⁴¹ However, the discussion was not altogether clear in the lexicons. For example, Thayer says that μεταμέλομαι refers to an emotional change, regret, even remorse and μετανοέω to a change of choice, entire life. He then proceeds to reject this distinction. He concludes by saying “μετανοέω is the fuller and nobler term, expressive of moral action and issues.”⁴² Similarly, Abbott-Smith is the only example of believing that these words are actually “synonymous,” and he cites Thayer for support (who actually distinguished between the two words).⁴³

Wilkin begins most of his discussions on the meaning of repentance from the meaning μετάνοια had in Classical Greek, as if that meaning would naturally carry over and should be the assumed meaning.⁴⁴ In fact, at one point he refers, etymologically, to “after thought” or “second thoughts.”⁴⁵ Abbott-Smith also defines μετάνοια as “after-thought, change of mind, repentance.”⁴⁶ Anderson refers to this as the root fallacy and counters by saying that in the contexts in which

³⁹ Matt 21:29, 32; 27:3; 2 Cor 7:8 (twice); Heb 7:21.

⁴⁰ Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 3,” 19; it should be kept in mind that Wilkin does not think “repentance” is a good translation for μετανοέω either. He does see some uses where μεταμέλομαι refers to changing one’s mind, and therefore would be synonymous with his understanding of μετανοέω (2 Cor 7:9; Matt 21:29), though he never says this explicitly. He does not view all uses of μεταμέλομαι this way (Matt 27:3). See also O. Michel, “μεταμέλομαι, κτλ,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:629, who says that all uses of these words are distinct.

⁴¹ Consistent with this, but with a major variation, Pink says that the three Greek words for repentance (μετανοέω, μετάνοια, and μεταμέλομαι) need to be combined to form genuine repentance. The first refers to a change of mind, the second, to a change of course or life, and the third to a change of heart. See Pink, *Repentance*, 27.

⁴² Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Company, 1886), 405.

⁴³ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937), 287. One other scholar was extremely close to referring to these terms as synonymous. Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, 33–34, says that they essentially mean the same except in Matt 27:3. In addition, Chamberlain, *The Meaning of Repentance*, 32–33, cites Hugo Grotius as objecting to a distinction between these words.

⁴⁴ See Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 3,” 13–14; “Repentance and Salvation, Part 1,” 16.

⁴⁵ Wilkin, “Part 6,” 17. He is not alone in doing this. Michel, “μεταμέλομαι, κτλ,” 626–27, mentions that μετανοέω comes from νοῦς (therefore referring to a change in mind or view) and μεταμέλομαι comes from μέλει (therefore referring to a change in feeling).

⁴⁶ Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 287.

μετανοέω occur, it must mean more than both “after thought” and “change your mind.”⁴⁷ This kind of dependence upon etymology has long been abandoned by scholarship, but it continues to rear its ugly head from time to time.⁴⁸

Conclusion: The Meaning of Repentance⁴⁹

The three main views on the definition of μετάνοια are: (1) a turning away from one's sins (not just a willingness or resolve to do so);⁵⁰ (2) the intention, resolve, or willingness to turn from sins;⁵¹ (3) to change one's mind (about something).⁵² Μετανοέω and μετάνοια do not mean “to be remorseful,” “to be sorry,” or “to regret”;⁵³ that is the primary meaning of μεταμέλομαι. It is more

⁴⁷ Anderson, “Repentance is for All Men,” 17.

⁴⁸ For support, see Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation*; Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meanings*, rev. and exp. ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1994); Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991); D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996); James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

⁴⁹ See Appendix 2 for a comparison of how two translations (NASB 1995 and NLT 1997) translated the Greek words for repentance.

⁵⁰ See James Montgomery Boice, *Christ's Call to Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 105–114; *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace? Recovering the Doctrines that Shook the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 141, 143–44; James Graham, “Repentance,” *EvQ* 25 (1953): 233; George Peters, “The Meaning of Conversion,” *BSac* 120 (1963): 238–9; Charles H. H. Scobie, *John the Baptist* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 80, 112, 148; A. W. Tozer, *The Best of A. W. Tozer*, compiled by W. W. Wiersbe (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1980), 185; Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton: Crossway, 1997), 252; William Barclay, *Great Themes of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 72–73; Grant, *An Introduction to New Testament Thought*, 216, 309; Daniel Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 151–54; Mark R. Talbot, *The Signs of True Conversion*, Today's Issues (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 14; Chantry, *Today's Gospel*, 47–50; J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1961), 70–73 (Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 1,” 17, n25, says that Packer just calls for a willingness to turn. However, Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 71, says that it “is not enough to resolve to turn from sin.” Admittedly, the following discussion in Packer does not make his view clear.); Robert N. Wilkin, “Does Your Mind Need Changing? Repentance Reconsidered,” *JEGS* 11, No. 20 (1998): 35–37 (His view has changed from his experience in church as a youth, to his conversion, to his dissertation, and his new belief. Even though he defines μετάνοια this way, he says it never occurs in a salvation context.); Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1989), 145–46, 160, says repentance is turning, but that it has nothing to do with salvation, just a harmonious relationship with God.

⁵¹ See Billy Graham, *How to Be Born Again* (Carmel, NY: Guideposts, 1977), 156–60; George Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 95–106; John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (London: InterVarsity, 1958), 112–13; 125–32; Pink, *Repentance*, 5 (at times he seems to say it is an actual turning, at other times a determination to turn).

⁵² See Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:372–78; G. Michael Cocoris, *Lordship Salvation-Is it Biblical?* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1983), 11–12; H. A. Ironside, *Except Ye Repent* (New York: American Tract Society, 1937), 34, 53; Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1959), 116–17.

⁵³ So Newman and Stine, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*, 60; Grant, *New Testament Thought*, 216; Frank Stagg, *New Testament Theology* (Nashville: Broadman, 1962), 118.

than a “change of mind.”⁵⁴ It is not “turning over a new leaf.”⁵⁵ Rather repentance involves a change in the mind and conduct, which involves a turning away from sins and turning to God, which produces demonstrable results.⁵⁶ The Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich lexicon says that μετάνοια means “‘a change of mind’ ... w. the nuance of ‘remorse’.”⁵⁷ This is an unsatisfactory conclusion. However, Louw and Nida say, “to change one’s way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness.”⁵⁸ Interestingly, they define ἐπιστροφή as “to change one’s manner of life in a particular direction, with the implication of turning back to God.”⁵⁹ The difference is minimal. To change one’s way of life versus to change one’s manner of life is insignificant. While in μετάνοια the change is the result of a change in thought and attitude toward sin, in ἐπιστροφή the change is toward a particular direction, namely toward God. While these words are not synonyms, to differentiate between them sharply would be inappropriate.

Some have bemoaned that μετάνοια and μετανοέω were translated by our English word repent.⁶⁰ Dement says the concept of repentance is “very difficult to express in other languages.”⁶¹ Kümmel prefers the translation “conversion” or

⁵⁴ Stagg, *New Testament Theology*, 118.

⁵⁵ Cf. Pink, *Repentance*, 13.

⁵⁶ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark’s Narrative*, 43, defines it as “a change in the direction of peoples’ lives.” Newman and Stine, *A Translator’s Handbook on The Gospel of Matthew*, 60, say it “involves a change of both attitude (or heart) and of conduct.” Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, 31, says it means “turning to God in faith.” Grant, *New Testament Thought*, 216, 309, says it means “living a new kind of life” different from the past, “turning about (*teshubah*) and facing in another direction.” Hans Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Harper, 1969), 118, says it means “the totality of conversion, a new orientation.” Stagg, *New Testament Theology*, 118–9, says it means “a basic change of way,” “a radical turn from one way of life to another.” Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 406, provides a lengthy definition in regards to μετάνοια: “the change of mind of those who have begun to abhor their errors and misdeeds, and have determined to enter upon a better course of life, so that it embraces both a recognition of sin and sorrow for it and hearty amendment, the tokens and effects of which are good deeds.” Contra Charles C. Bing, “How to Share the Gospel Clearly,” *JEGS* 7, No. 12 (1994): 62, who says it is “not an outer change in conduct.”

⁵⁷ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed. rev. and ed. F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 640.

⁵⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988, 1989), 2:510.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Robert C. Tannehill, *The Shape of Luke’s Story: Essays on Luke-Acts* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2005), 86, has a similar conclusion. He says that μετανοέω and μετάνοια emphasize “a change in thinking and attitude, compared to one’s previous life, and ἐπιστρέφω is suggesting the positive side of this change: the reestablishment of a harmonious relation to God.”

⁶⁰ The best discussion found on the translation history of μετανοέω is in Chamberlain, *The Meaning of Repentance*, 27–32. Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 3,” 21, calls it an “extraordinary mistranslation.”

⁶¹ B. H. Dement, “Repent,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:136.

“convert.”⁶² Genuine repentance contains three elements: cognitive (understand some things about God and sin), emotional (abhor sin), and volitional (determination to forsake sins).⁶³

Some would accuse those viewing repentance this way as denying justification by grace through faith (alone).⁶⁴ This understanding does not make repentance a work; instead, Scripture clearly calls it a gift.⁶⁵ This can be seen specifically in Acts 11:18, Rom 2:4, and 2 Tim 2:25: repentance is not achieved, but received. It is not a work; it is not a way to merit or be rewarded salvation.⁶⁶ Therefore, repentance is a God-enabled human response.⁶⁷

Can the Old Testament help us understand the New Testament meaning of μετάνοια? The data is agreed upon, but conclusions differ.⁶⁸ If anything, the idea of turning from sins may not have been dominant, but changing one's mind may have been. Conclusions are tenuous. This is the reason that the emphasis has remained on the evaluation of the data from the New Testament. Two aspects of repentance need to be distinguished. The emphasis in Scripture is upon the initial act of an unbeliever turning away from his sins and coming to faith in Christ. However, repentance is also a part of progressive sanctification, whereby Christians continually confess and align their lives with God's will (see Luke 22:31–32; Eph 4:22–23; Rev 2:5,⁶⁹ 16; 3:3, 19).⁷⁰ It exists throughout one's Christian life.⁷¹

⁶² However, this is based upon the following tenuous grounds: “For the Aramaic word which is translated as ‘repentance’ in actuality denotes the turning around, the abandoning of the wrong road and the resolute taking of the right road.” See Kümmel, *The Theology of the New Testament*, 29. Stagg, *New Testament Theology*, 119, and France, *Mark*, 93, agree with Kümmel's suggestion of “conversion.” Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 146, is content with the translation “repent.”

⁶³ Cf. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 254; Barclay, *Great Themes of the New Testament*, 73; Graham, *How to Be Born Again*, 156–60; Talbot, *The Signs of True Conversion*, 14. Pink, *Repentance*, 5, says it contains four elements: (1) the occasion of repentance is sin; (2) changed mind; (3) sorrow for sin; and (4) the fruit is a determination to change.

⁶⁴ Note Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, 29: “Salvation by faith alone must inevitably be rejected if faith is defined as intellectual assent.”

⁶⁵ See *Ibid.*, 32; Stagg, *New Testament Theology*, 119.

⁶⁶ Cf. Grant, *New Testament Thought*, 310. Despite the fact that “Throughout church history nearly every theologian has taught that repentance is essential for salvation from hell” (Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 1,” 11), certain individuals have found ways around this. Particularly disturbing is Wilkin's use of “the analogy of faith” (the hermeneutical principle that clear passages should be used to understand the unclear passages). He essentially labels any passage that on the surface may contradict his conclusions as “unclear.” It is hard for this interpreter to understand what is so unclear about Luke 24:47, for example.

⁶⁷ See Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 256.

⁶⁸ For discussions, see Robert N. Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 2: The Doctrine of Repentance in the Old Testament,” *JEGS* 2, No. 1 (1989): 13–26; Charles H. H. Scobie, *John the Baptist* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 80–81; Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 251–54; Grant, *New Testament Thought*, 216, 309; Luter, “Repentance,” 672–3; Dement, “Repent,” 136–37; Chamberlain, *The Meaning of Repentance*, 34–35.

⁶⁹ Since the author repeats “repent” at the conclusion of the verse, he is suggesting that the content of the middle of the verse (“do the deeds you did at first”) communicated how repentance is to be demonstrated.

⁷⁰ See Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 255.

Summary of Findings

Verse	Concept
Matthew 3:7–9	Genuine repentance includes good fruit
Mark 1:14–15	Repentance and faith are inseparable, linked; repentance precedes faith
Matthew 12:41	Repentance linked to turning; also related to believing
Acts 3:19	Repenting and turning are related
Acts 10:43	Repentance, believing, and turning are all related to each other and to forgiveness of sins
Acts 11:19	Believing and turning are related
Acts 20:20	Repentance is directed toward God; it precedes believing
Acts 26:20	Paul characterized his ministry as a call to repent

Repentance and the Fourth Gospel

Previous Conclusions

Bing’s brash challenge will now be undertaken: “Let the debate over the Gospel begin with John’s Gospel, unless we would accuse him of preaching half a gospel or easy-believism.”⁷² It has been frequently noted that the Fourth Gospel never uses μετανοέω nor μετάνοια, and Wilkin concludes that “nowhere in the book is the concept of turning from sins given as a condition for obtaining eternal life.”⁷³ In fact, supporters of what is commonly referred to as “No Lordship Salvation” have gone as far as saying that John “took great care not to mention it.”⁷⁴

The most extensive examination in print is by Bing, “The Condition for Salvation in John’s Gospel.” However, he considered only a few figures of speech: look (3:14–15); hear (5:24; 8:43, 47; 10:16, 27); enter (10:9); feed (6:57); come (6:35); and receive (1:12). Many of his conclusions are well supported. However, his evaluation left out many other possibilities.

The “No Lordship” argument is along the following lines: The Fourth Gospel was *obviously* written as an evangelistic tract (John 20:31), attempting to lead people to receive Christ. Since this is true, how could repentance not be mentioned if it was truly part of the gospel? It would mean that John failed in presenting the gospel.⁷⁵ Pink, who wrote many years before the current controversy, said, “But

⁷¹ Cf. Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, 33.

⁷² Charles C. Bing, “The Condition for Salvation in John’s Gospel,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 9, no. 16 (1996): 33.

⁷³ Wilkin, “Part 6,” 15. He adds that Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, and Martha were never told to repent.

⁷⁴ Wilkin, “Does Your Mind Need Changing?,” 40. Cf. Bing, “The Condition for Salvation in John’s Gospel,” 33.

⁷⁵ For one example among many, see Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 146–47.

John's Gospel is plainly addressed unto those who *are* saved (see 1:16). It is that Gospel which sets forth the Son in relation to the sons of God. John 20:31 obviously means that this Gospel is written to *strengthen* the faith of believers."⁷⁶ The complicated issue of the tense of πιστεύω in John 20:31 cannot be evaluated currently, but the conclusion of Silva and Carson that regardless of the tense there remains an evangelistic intent is surely judicious.⁷⁷

Method

After arriving at a definition of the concept of repentance in the New Testament, the Fourth Gospel was read to see if any texts presented themselves as candidates for a closer look. After these texts were designated, they were evaluated to see if they (1) contain the concept of repentance, (2) contain aspects of the concept of repentance; (3) contain the concept of repentance but not in reference to eternal life/salvation; or (4) contained no reference to the New Testament's concept of repentance. The claim is that not only does the Fourth Gospel's silence refute repentance as a part of salvation, but also there is no reference whatsoever to this concept.⁷⁸

Thoughts on Items Missing from the Fourth Gospel⁷⁹

In order to provide a small amount of evidence to the proposition that because something is not explicitly stated that it is not communicated, some items will now be brought forth to show that this idea is incorrect. The virgin birth is not mentioned in the Fourth Gospel, but that does not mean that the author did not know about it or intentionally left it out because he disagreed with it. The word (noun form) "faith" is absent from the Fourth Gospel. Hell (ἄδης [Hades], γέεννα [Gehenna], τάρταρώ [Tartarus]) is not mentioned in the Fourth Gospel. Regarding other New Testament books, the verb "to believe" is absent from Revelation, and the noun form occurs only four times. While the verb "to save" occurs in Matthew fifteen times, Jesus is never called Savior. Similarly, the verb "to save" occurs in Mark fourteen times and "salvation" just once, but Jesus is never called Savior. If the absence of a word means *de facto* that the author purposefully left it out and/or the concept is not present then:

- (1) The concept of Jesus as Savior is absent from Matthew, Mark, Romans, Colossians, Hebrews, and Revelation;
- (2) The concept of grace is absent from Matthew and Mark;
- (3) The concept of salvation is absent (in noun form) from Matthew and completely in Colossians;

⁷⁶ Pink, *Repentance*, 10.

⁷⁷ D. A. Carson, "The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel: John 20:31 Reconsidered," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987): 640; Moisés Silva, "Approaching the Fourth Gospel," *CTR* 3 (1988): 22.

⁷⁸ Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, 148.

⁷⁹ See Appendix 3 for the chart containing some of the evidence for the following conclusions.

(4) The verb πιστεύω does not occur in Colossians or Revelation and the noun πίστις does not occur in the Fourth Gospel.

These conclusions are unwarranted: the absence of a word does not necessitate the absence of the concept.

Possibilities

The following texts were identified as possibilities and examined to test their merits:

- (1) References to John the Baptist and baptism: 1:23–34; 3:23–29; 10:40.
- (2) Jesus as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”: 1:29.
- (3) The wedding at Cana: could the reference to the purification jars be a reference to repentance: 2:1–13?
- (4) Born from above/anew and born of water and spirit: 3:3–7.
- (5) The lifting up of the snake in the wilderness: 3:14 (see Num 21:4–9).
- (6) Light and darkness motif throughout Fourth Gospel: 1:4–9; 3:19–21; 8:12; 9:5.
- (7) The relationship of obedience and believing: 3:36.
- (8) Jesus pointing out the Samaritan woman’s sinful life: 4:16–18.
- (9) Jesus’ command to not sin: 5:14; 8:11.
- (10) The motif of hearing and its relationship to obedience: 5:24; 12:47.
- (11) The motif of “coming”: 5:40; 6:35.
- (12) “die in sin”: 8:21.
- (13) “continue to follow”: 8:31.
- (14) obeying Jesus’ teaching equals never seeing death: 8:51; 17:6.
- (15) “turn to me” from Isaiah: 12:40.
- (16) Obedience and love: 14:15, 21, 23–24.
- (17) Remain and bear fruit: 15:1–5.
- (18) Peter’s restoration: 21:15–17, 19b.

An analysis of the majority of these concepts and texts in relationship to repentance has not been accomplished. While space does not permit an extensive discussion of each text, the most helpful texts will be evaluated now. Some texts were found to provide no concrete evidence for the concept of repentance and others that may have provided some, albeit weak evidence, are excluded from the current study.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Those that are not discussed and are rejected include: the motif of “coming”: 5:40; 6:35 (so Bing, “John’s Gospel,” 26); “die in sin” of 8:21 (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1991), 341, says that the singular “sin” refers to the sin of unbelief, a rejection of Jesus). Admittedly, this phrase could be stretched to fit the concept of repentance, but it would put this analysis on tenuous ground. The passages considered but ultimately rejected include: John the Baptist and baptism (1:23–28); Lamb of God (1:29); the wedding at Cana (2:1–12); Jesus pointing out the Samaritan woman’s sinful life (4:16–18); the motif of “coming” (5:40; 6:35); “continue to follow” (8:31); obeying Jesus’ teaching equals never seeing death (8:51; 17:6); and obedience and love (14:15, 21, 23–24); Peter’s restoration (21:15–17, 19b).

Discussion of Texts

Born Again or Born From Above: 3:3–5

Jesus informs Nicodemus that he must be γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν. The first problem is the meaning of ἄνωθεν: is it “again” or “from above”? The occurrence of this same word in 3:31 with the unquestioned meaning “from above” quickly tilts the evidence in that direction.⁸¹ It also has that meaning in 19:11, 23. However, when some go back to the underlying Aramaic the discussion quickly gets muddled.⁸² Therefore, what does the phrase “born from above” mean in this context? While the expression likely harkens the readers of the Fourth Gospel to think back to 1:12–13 (which it then would mean “born of God”),⁸³ Jesus himself explains it again to Nicodemus in 3:5: to be born from above means to be born of water and spirit.⁸⁴ While water has been interpreted as a reference to baptism,⁸⁵ purification, and natural birth,⁸⁶ utilizing Ezek 36:25–27⁸⁷ makes an explanation easier. The themes in the Ezekiel 36 passage are of cleansing (“sprinkle clean water ... and you will be clean”) and a new spirit (“put a new spirit within you”). God’s desired response is that the people will “walk in My statutes” and “observe My ordinances.” The whole passage is a call to repentance, to return to God, and a description of what God will

⁸¹ Those deciding on “born from above” include: Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 1:538–39; Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. by John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 126; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953–1954), 133; ; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols., The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1966–1970), 1:130; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2d ed., Word Biblical Commentary 36 (Waco, TX: Word, 1999), 47–48. Deciding on anew or again: Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes*, 2 vols. in 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 107–09. In favor of both: Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 188–89.

⁸² For example, Hendriksen, *John*, 133; Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 125.

⁸³ So Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:546–7.

⁸⁴ Cf. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 191; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 48.

⁸⁵ For those who think it refers to Christian baptism: Luther (from Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 192). See also Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:547–48; Ernst A. Haenchen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Robert W. Funk, 2 vols. Hermenia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 1:200 (his view becomes somewhat inconsistent as he discusses the passage); Beasley-Murray, *John*, 48; and Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2:139–41. That it refers to John’s baptism: Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 108–09. For an argument against this, see J. D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 189–90.

⁸⁶ So H. Odeberg, *The Fourth Gospel* (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1968), 48–71; Leon Morris, *Jesus is the Christ: Studies in the Theology of John* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 150–51; Ben Witherington III, “The Waters of Birth: John 3:5 and 1 John 5:6–8,” *NTS* 35, No. 1 (1989): 155–60.

⁸⁷ See Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 188 (who also references Jer 31:28ff.; Isa 32:15–20; 44:3; Ezek 11:19–20; 39:29). One reason to look for the background in the OT is Jesus’ astonishment that Nicodemus was the teacher of Israel, but did not understand Jesus (3:10) (Cf. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 190). On the other hand, Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 128, declares that the background is John’s baptism: “The message of the kingdom was bound up from the beginning not only with the call to repentance but also with water baptism.”

do: “cleans(e) human hearts” and “inner transformation by his Spirit.”⁸⁸ In fact, “Qumran’s *Manual of Discipline* connects Ezekiel 36 with immersion and repentance (1QS 3.8–9).”⁸⁹

However, Ezekiel 36 is not quoted nor *directly* alluded to in John 3. Therefore, this likely background text should not be pressed too far. Regardless, enough exists in Jesus’ own words to formulate a conclusion: “be born from above” means “to be born of water and spirit.” To be born of water refers to being cleansed and being born of the spirit refers to the Spirit that God will place in us. This “water-spirit” is the origin of the regeneration that is demanded. Both of these result in living a radically different life; they involve changing. Jesus is exhorting Nicodemus to change his life, his manner of living; He is not calling for a change just in his way of thinking, but all of himself. Hendriksen refers to being born from above as a “radical change,”⁹⁰ and Morris as a “divine remaking.”⁹¹ Certainly, Carson’s understanding that this passage’s focus is on “the need for *transformation*”⁹² fits the current understanding as well. Both relate to the concept of repentance, whereby someone is called to change their ways.

*The Snake in the Wilderness: John 3:14–15 and Numbers 21:4–9*⁹³

The primary connection being made between these passages both in John and Numbers is the lifting up of the serpent to the lifting up of Jesus.⁹⁴ Secondly, as the Israelites were to turn to the serpent to preserve (physical) life, people are called upon to believe in Jesus for eternal life.

Numbers 21:4–5 contains an explanation of the sin of the Israelites; verse 6 provides the consequence of that sin (serpents attacking and killing the Israelites). The people came to Moses in Num 21:7 and said, “We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us.” This verse describes the repentance of the Israelites from their sin. In response, God told Moses to place a serpent upon a bronze pole, and whoever looked at it would not die. Therefore, the connection between Numbers and the Fourth Gospel is twofold. Primarily, the author of the Fourth Gospel is discussing Jesus’ lifting up (which Nicodemus probably did not understand until sometime after the crucifixion). Second, just as the Israelites “looked” at the serpent and were given life, so belief in Jesus gives life. However, Numbers 21 portrayed the Israelites as repenting, turning from their sin, and *then*

⁸⁸ Andreas J. Köstenberger, “John,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 2:35.

⁸⁹ Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:551.

⁹⁰ Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary*, 133.

⁹¹ Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 193.

⁹² Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 190.

⁹³ Note that Bing, “The Condition for Salvation in John’s Gospel,” never considers the Numbers 21 text.

⁹⁴ So *ibid.*, 201. Contra Köstenberger, “John,” 37.

“‘looking’ in faith.”⁹⁵ While the background of Ezekiel 36 proposed for John 3:3–5 was not a direct reference, this background is a direct reference. Bing examined the idea of “looking,”⁹⁶ but failed to examine the context of the passage and its OT background.

Light and Darkness Motif: 3:19–21; 8:12; 9:5

The main passage dealing with the light and darkness motif is 3:19–21.⁹⁷ While 1:4–9 uses similar terms to 3:19–21, this latter passage can be distinguished since light and darkness here “have clear moral connotations.”⁹⁸ The themes of light and darkness can be found in the OT: “The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them” (Isa 9:2). This was understood to be a messianic reference by some.⁹⁹

John 3:19–21 comes at the end of the Nicodemus narrative with the Evangelist¹⁰⁰ reflecting upon believing in Jesus, which leads to eternal life. Jesus is the Light who has come into the world so that people could have eternal life, rather than judgment. However, people love darkness because by staying in darkness the evil deeds that they practice can stay hidden. They did not want their life to be examined and shown wanting; they did not want to stop living in sin. This reflection by the Evangelist tells why Nicodemus’ belief was inadequate, and consequently, why those in 2:23–25 had an unacceptable faith: men love the darkness rather than the light.¹⁰¹ Rather than coming to the Light (Jesus), they flee

⁹⁵ Köstenberger, “John,” 37.

⁹⁶ Bing, “The Condition for Salvation in John’s Gospel,” 30–33.

⁹⁷ It appeared very convenient for Bing, “The Condition for Salvation in John’s Gospel,” 4, to consider 3:14–15, but not mention 3:16–21.

⁹⁸ Köstenberger, “John,” 38.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Not all commentators agree, but a consensus is that by verse 16 Jesus has stopped speaking. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 185, 302; Gary M. Burge, *John: NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 113, 117–18; Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 202; Borchert, *John 1–11*, 180, believe the Evangelist starts at verse 16. As do Bernard, Lagrange, Westcott, Van den Bussche, Braun and Lightfoot (according to Rudolph Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, trans. Kevin Smyth, Cecily Hastings, et al., [London: Burns & Oates, 1968, 1980, 1982], 1:360). However, Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:360, thinks the reflections started at verse 13 (he cites Calmes, Belser and Tillmann for support). Contra Francis J. Moloney, *John*, Sacra Pagina 4 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 90, and Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:149, who say 3:16–21 are still Jesus’ words. That 3:16 begins a reflection can be shown by: (1) the reference to *ἔδωκεν*; and (2) the terminology is consistent with the author. To those who disagree, they must answer what “gave” refers to: the Incarnation or the crucifixion (or both?)

¹⁰¹ For evidence of the connection between Nicodemus and the many, see Zane C. Hodges, “Untrustworthy Believers: John 2:23–25: problem passages in the Gospel of John, pt 2,” *BSac* 135 (1978): 150; Craig L. Blomberg, “The Globalization of Biblical Interpretation: A Test Case—John 3–4,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5 (1995): 6; David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 38; Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:135; Haenchen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 1:199; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 55; R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 135; John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 44. Contra Rudolph K. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, ed. R. W. N. Hoare and J. K. Riches, trans. George

from it so they do not have their sins exposed. The word ἐλέγχω refers to “not only exposure but shame and conviction.”¹⁰² The Evangelist continues (3:20) by saying that those who refuse the Light actually hate the Light. This is followed by a contrast with those who “practice the truth.” These ones do not flee from the Light because their life is full of deeds “worked in God.” The comparison is between those who believe in Jesus and those who do not. The description of those who believe is that they are obedient, abiding, and following the commands of Christ (thereby loving Him). The description of those who do not believe is that they have refused to turn from their evil ways; this is a description of those who have refused to repent. They do not turn from their sins and turn to God in belief. Therefore, one who believes is characterized as having turned from their evil ways and is living a life where their deeds are “accomplished in God.”

This passage is paradigmatic for the concept of “believing” in the Fourth Gospel. Whenever this concept is discussed, readers of the Fourth Gospel would (at least from this point on) understand that one who believes is one who has changed his life, been radically transformed. In addition, future passages that refer to light (8:12; 9:5) should be viewed alongside this passage: Jesus, as the light of the world, causes people to choose sides. Some walk in darkness and are judged; others do not walk in darkness and possess eternal life.

A verse that may not seem connected on the surface to believing and the motif of light and darkness is 16:9.¹⁰³ While the Fourth Gospel describes sin in 15:21–25, it is now explicitly defined as unbelief: “The world reacts to Jesus by clinging on to itself, by μένει ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ.”¹⁰⁴ In 16:9, the problematic¹⁰⁵ ἐλέγχω occurs: “in every instance the verb has to do with showing someone his sin, usually as a summons to repentance.”¹⁰⁶ Therefore, to convict the world is shaming it and attempting to persuade it of its guiltiness, and in this way “calling it to repentance.”¹⁰⁷ The goal of the Holy Spirit is to convince the world that it is guilty in sin so that it will turn to God and stop sinning. Repentance is always turning from *sin*; the Fourth Gospel defines sin as unbelief. When one is said to believe, they have repented from the unbelief, the sin.

When a character in the Fourth Gospel is portrayed (positively) as believing, there is always a description of action in the context to communicate to the reader what Johannine belief demands of one who responds to Jesus. Those who are

R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 133; Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1:365. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 185, takes a mediating position saying that though Nicodemus is here representing the “many,” he later progresses.

¹⁰² Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 207. See comments on John 16:9 below for further analysis on this word.

¹⁰³ Cf. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 532–33.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 563.

¹⁰⁵ For his detailed treatment, see D. A. Carson, “The Function of the Paraclete in John 16:7–11,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1979): 547–66. Or see Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 534–39. The verb occurs eighteen times (Matt 18:15; Lk 3:19; John 3:20; 8:46; 1 Cor 14:24; Eph 5:11, 13; 1 Tim 5:20; 2 Tim 4:2; Tit 1:9, 13; 2:15; Heb 12:5; Jas 2:9; Jude 15, 22; Rev 3:19).

¹⁰⁶ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 537.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

portrayed negatively are not described as doing these actions; therefore, their response of belief is less than what Jesus was demanding. John 3:19–21 connects the ideas of believing and ethics (moral activity). Those who do not believe have their “moral actions” described as “evil deeds.” Those who believe have ceased from partaking in “evil deeds” and now are doing works “wrought in God.” They have turned away from their sinful lives. In John 3 terminology, they are now born from above, born of water and spirit. They have been cleansed and have a new heart; this has been evidenced by their changed life (see Ezek 36:27). These words are reminiscent of John the Baptist’s preaching in Matt 3:8: “bring about fruit worthy of repentance.” Those who the Fourth Gospel describes as πιστεύων are also described as having a changed life (not just mind). No one is portrayed positively as believing when this component is missing.

Belief and Obedience: 3:36

Including the passage of John 3:36 in this discussion is based primarily on three reasons: (1) the relationship between believing and obedience has been controversial;¹⁰⁸ (2) the relationship is significant for understanding believing; and (3) the lack of attention given to this verse in relationship to this discussion.¹⁰⁹

The primary purpose of this verse is twofold: (1) unbelief is shown by disobedience; and (2) a contrast in the results of each. The verb ἀπειθέω is antonymous to πιστεύω. The present participles in both verbs reinforce the concept of continuity. Obedience is presented as a natural result of one who believes.¹¹⁰ Therefore, the Evangelist’s¹¹¹ portrayal of people’s belief can be known by their actions of obedience or disobedience to Jesus. Part of a correct understanding of repentance relates to this: one aspect of repentance is the changing of one’s actions in order to line up with God’s Word. This is very similar to obedience. Therefore, while obedience and repentance are not synonyms, nor nearly synonymous, obedience in 3:36 is a result of belief, and it is also a result of repentance.

¹⁰⁸ See Kim Riddlebarger, “What is Faith?,” in *Christ the Lord*, ed. Michael S. Horton (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 95–97.

¹⁰⁹ While Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 214, alludes to this discussion, Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free!*, does not. For a random sample, none of the following discuss it: Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 151; F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 97–98; or Leon Morris, *Reflections on the Gospel of John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 119.

¹¹⁰ Riddlebarger, “What is Faith?,” 104, says, “one who has exercised faith in Christ, and is united to Christ by that faith, will repent and will struggle to obey and yield. Nevertheless, these things are not conditions for nor component parts of faith itself. They are fruits of saving faith. They are the inevitable activity of the new nature.”

¹¹¹ Note that that 3:31–36 is taken as a reflection by the Evangelist (so Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 212; however, Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:581, is undecided). Contra Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 3,” 21, who says that John the Baptist was speaking in 3:36. Therefore, significantly, John the Baptist presents believing in Jesus as the sole condition of eternal salvation.

Stop Sinning: 5:14; 8:11

Two passages exist where Jesus tells an individual not to sin: 5:14 and 8:11. In 8:11, the woman caught in adultery is told to go and sin no more. While an analysis on how this phrase may be linked to repentance could be convincing, because this text is not accepted as part of the original text of the Fourth Gospel, it cannot be utilized for the current purposes.¹¹²

However, the text in 5:14 does not pose the same textual problems. While the connection between the sin and the disease may be unclear, Jesus' words concerning what He is supposed to do are not. Jesus' words have been translated in two ways ("stop sinning;"¹¹³ and "do not continue sinning any longer"),¹¹⁴ which essentially have the same meaning. Grammatically, some have assumed that a present imperative that is prohibitive must be understood as "stop" doing something. However, while "that may be the correct interpretation in this instance . . . there are too many exceptions to this grammatical 'rule' to base the interpretation on the present tense."¹¹⁵ Carson points out that the present imperative is used to stress urgency (as compared to an aorist imperative).¹¹⁶ Therefore, this is essentially an injunction to repent. Jesus is telling him to change his ways, turn his life around, and turn to God. The command to "stop sinning" is conceptually equivalent to "turn away from sin." The narrative about the man who received sight in chapter 9 may be viewed in contrast to the lame man in chapter 5:¹¹⁷ while the blind man is viewed positively, the lame man is portrayed negatively. As the pericope closes, the reader is left viewing the lame man as unbelieving. Jesus confronts one who does not believe with these words: "stop sinning." The context is salvific, not of progressive sanctification. The conclusions by some,¹¹⁸ that calling for unbelievers to turn from their sin is adding works to the gospel, is strongly questioned by this verse. It is fascinating that, in the discussions on repenting in the Fourth Gospel, no one was found who raised this verse as a possibility.

¹¹² A full-blown text critical discussion cannot be accomplished at this time. However, a recent work giving solid evidence for the spuriousness of this text is William L. Peterson, "ΟΥΔΕ ΕΓΩ [ΚΑΤΑ]ΚΡΙΝΩ. John 8:11, The *Protevangeliū IACOBI*, and The History of the *Pericope Adulterae*," in *Sayings of Jesus: Canonical and Non-Canonical: Essays in Honour of Tjitze Baarda*, eds. William L. Peterson, Johan S. Vos, and Henk J. De Jonge (New York: Brill, 1997), 191–221. For a sampling of the commentaries that reject this text as authentic, see Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 285–87; Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:735–37. For opposing views, see Zane C. Hodges, "Problem Passages in the Gospel of John, Part 8: The Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7:53–8:11): The Text," *BSac* 136 (1979): 318–32; John Paul Heil, "A Rejoinder to 'Reconsidering 'The Story of Jesus and the Adulteress Reconsidered,'" *Bib* 72 (1991): 182–91.

¹¹³ So Borchert, *John 1–11*, 235; Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 272.

¹¹⁴ So Beasley-Murray, *John*, 74; Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:208; Haenchen, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 1:247.

¹¹⁵ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 246, n1.

¹¹⁶ See *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ See Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 139–40, for a detailed comparison and contrast.

¹¹⁸ See fn 1.

The Fourth Gospel's Paraphrase of Isaiah 6:10: John 12:40

Another candidate for repentance in the Fourth Gospel occurs in John 12:40 with the Evangelist's use of στρέφω. The Fourth Gospel paraphrases Isaiah saying, "He has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted (or turn back) and I heal them." This text,¹¹⁹ from Isa 6:10,¹²⁰ while it could be understood as referring back to the rejection described in 1:11,¹²¹ is better understood in the immediate context of 12:36–12:39, 41–42.¹²² Evans says that chapter 12 functions "to explain how a messianic claimant who performs one messianic sign after another finds himself rejected and crucified."¹²³ The context in Isaiah 6 is that after Isaiah had a vision which resulted in his "repentance and cleansing,"¹²⁴ he offers to serve the Lord saying, "Here I am." God informs Isaiah of the response he will receive from the people. What is God saying to Isaiah? "Later rabbis emphasized the note of repentance"¹²⁵ in this text. Most all scholarly research on repentance has connected the underlying Hebrew word used in Isa 6:10 (שוב) with the concept of the definition of repentance presented in this research: turning away from sin.¹²⁶ The Greek word used here, στρέφω, means to turn.¹²⁷ The Septuagint used the word to

¹¹⁹ It is closer to the Hebrew than the LXX. So Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 448; Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 2:883. Note that C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 272, says that John was using a text that was known by Paul. For his full, yet still unconvincing, explanation, see C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1952), 36–39.

¹²⁰ Which is also quoted in the NT at Matt 13:13–15; Mark 4:11–12; 8:17–18; Luke 8:10; 19:42; Acts 28:26–27. It may be alluded to in Rom 11:8, 10. Interestingly, while Isa 6:10 comes from Jesus' lips in the Synoptic Gospels, it is presented as a Christian explanation in the Fourth Gospel (Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:485).

¹²¹ Cf. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 2: 883.

¹²² Regarding 12:41, "the Evangelist justifies the interpretation of Is. 6.10 in relation to the word of Jesus. The beholding of the glory of Jesus by the prophet must mean the Temple vision of Is. 6" (Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 452, n. 4).

¹²³ Craig A. Evans, "Obduracy and the Lord's Servant: Some Observations on the Use of the Old Testament in the Fourth Gospel," in *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis: Studies in Memory of William Hugh Brownlee*, eds. Craig A. Evans and William F. Stinespring (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 223. Note that Evans did his dissertation on this topic: Craig A. Evans, "Isaiah 6:9–10 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1983).

¹²⁴ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 448.

¹²⁵ Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 2:883.

¹²⁶ However, Wilkin, "Repentance and Salvation, Part 3," 20, after footnoting this verse and saying that *strephō* compounds can refer to "turning from sins," "Nowhere in the NT are these verbs used to indicate that one must turn from his sins to obtain salvation."

¹²⁷ In the LXX, the word used is ἐπιστρέφω; the Hebrew word is שׁוּב. For שׁוּב meaning "repent," see 1 Kings 8:47; 2 Chron 6:37; Ps 7:12; Jer 5:3; 8:4; 15:7, 19; 18:8; 31:19; 34:15; Ezek 14:6; 18:30, 32; Hos 11:5; Zech 1:6; Job 36:10; Isa 30:15; 59:20. For more great insights on שׁוּב and ἐπιστρέφω and μετανοέω, see Tannehill, *The Shape of Luke's Story*, 87. Regarding στρέφω, Brown (*The Gospel According to John*, 1: 484) says that it "really has the sense of a middle voice: 'turn themselves.'" Anderson, "Repentance is for All Men," 19, concludes that in Isa 6:10 it must refer to an external turning, not an internal. Therefore, turning from sins would then be the fruit of repentance and believing. His definition: "an internal resolve to turn from one's sins."

refer to repentance. The quote of Isa 6:9–10 in Matt 13:15 and Mark 4:12 uses the word ἐπιστρέφω rather than simply στρέφω. As mentioned above, ἐπιστρέφω and μετάνοια should not be distinguished sharply.¹²⁸

The paraphrase in 12:40¹²⁹ is connected to the quote in 12:38.¹³⁰ The main theme connecting them is the question of why the Jews did not believe; they also contain themes of being lifted up, glory, and sin.¹³¹ The aspect of their unbelief¹³² addressed is that of hardening (obduracy), which is the opposite of repenting.

The author of the Fourth Gospel has taken some liberties in his citation of Isa 6:10. He emphasizes the blinding of eyes and hardening of hearts, and changes (from the Septuagint) the passive (“has become hardened”) to the active (“He blinded”). This change presents the peoples hardness as “a regrettable fact.”¹³³ The Hebrew uses an imperative: “Make the heart of this people.” He has not included the “deafness” mentioned in Isaiah 6:10.¹³⁴ Goodwin concludes that the text the Evangelist was using was, nonetheless, the Septuagint.¹³⁵

There are two major, conflicting ways to understand this verse. First, this hardening in no way rejects human responsibility. Israel had consistently been confronted with following God and consistently rejected Him.¹³⁶ Unbelief is not blamed upon a harsh, predestinarian God, but is portrayed as a punishment.¹³⁷ This

¹²⁸ In fact, Tannehill, *The Shape of Luke's Story*, 85, says that sometimes ἐπιστρέφω “is equivalent to repentance: a change in attitude and orientation that results in a new relation to God and fellow humans.” Later he says that ἐπιστρέφω and μετάνοια “are largely interchangeable terms.”

¹²⁹ Note another possible parallel (allusion) is Deut 29:3–4: “the great trials which your eyes have seen, those great signs and wonders. Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear” (see Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:486).

¹³⁰ Note that since the quote in 12:38 is exactly parallel to the LXX and 12:40 is not, Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 452–53, concludes that the ecclesiastical redactor added the latter. Regarding the quote from Isa 53:1 in 12:38, Ridderbos (*The Gospel of John*, 444 [italics added]) says that not only the similarity between unbelief in Jesus’ and Isaiah’s day are correlated, but this unbelief is placed “in the light of God’s ongoing dealings with his *backsliding* people in the whole history of revelation.” In other words, the idea of unrepentant people is a prevalent theme or correlation even in John 12:38. For a discussion on 12:38 and the Servant Song’s influence on Christianity and the Fourth Gospel, see M. D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant: The Influence of the Servant Concept of Deutero-Isaiah in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1959). For a rejection of this thesis, see R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of the Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (London: Tyndale, 1971), 110–35.

¹³¹ So Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 450.

¹³² Some refer to this text as explaining theodicy (the question of how evil could exist in this world if God is a good God). For a well-thought-out treatment of theodicy and John 12, see Borchert, *John 12–21*, 63–65. Note the parallel theme by Paul in Romans 9–11.

¹³³ Charles Goodwin, “How Did John Treat His Sources?” *JBL* 73, No. 2 (1954): 71.

¹³⁴ See Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 2:883; Charles K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 431, plausibly postulates that he left out the “hearing” because he was focusing on the signs wrought by Jesus and observed by the Jews.

¹³⁵ Goodwin, “How Did John Treat His Sources?,” 71, also says he was not using “some freak version” of the Hebrew.

¹³⁶ See Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 431. The concept of salvation history should be kept in mind when considering the Jews’ rejection of Jesus (cf. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 537). After their rejection was complete, salvation was opened to the Gentiles.

¹³⁷ So Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 444.

punishment takes the form of God abandoning them in their unbelief “which whatever God gives them to see and hear can no longer lead to salvation, that is, to repentance and healing.”¹³⁸

The second way to understand the original Isaiah text is as a use of irony. Hollenbach is the major promoter of this view.¹³⁹ First, Hollenbach defines irony as “an expression of scorn directed against someone made by the speaker taken at face value.”¹⁴⁰ The problem with irony is that, especially in English, there is no way to communicate it in the text. Therefore, context remains determinative in deciding where irony exists.

Hollenbach said, “Isaiah 6.9, 10a serves largely to *characterize* the audience to which Isaiah’s message will be directed.”¹⁴¹ It was not that Isaiah was told to command them to be hardened (as the Hebrew text appears to indicate) but he was told that they would be hardened (as the Septuagint appears to indicate). It seems as though the translators of the Septuagint were making the irony more explicit. This can also be seen in Matt 13:15 and Acts 28:27, in which they say, “they have closed their eyes.” Therefore, the people rejected God. “John 12:40a basically quotes Isaiah 6.10a to show that the whole of Jesus’ ministry was prophesied by Isaiah to effect stubborn unbelief.”¹⁴² Since Jesus is the subject in 12:40, He would be the one who was blinding the people. This makes His appeal in 12:35–36 seem disingenuous. Hollenbach concludes that the most plausible way of understanding Isa 6:10b (and John 12:40b) is as a statement of irony, “showing God’s disgust with the unwillingness of His people to respond to Him.”¹⁴³ If that is true, then the attitude of God toward his people in Isaiah is parallel to Jesus’ attitude toward the crowd in 12:35–36: “although time is running out, they are reluctant to respond.”¹⁴⁴ According to Hollenbach, this verse is used by the Evangelist to explain why the crowd did not want to repent.

Both of these views have much to commend them, but since the evidence for Johannine irony has been mounting in recent research, Hollenbach’s argument has more to favor it. With this understanding, the themes of believing and repentance have come to the front as the themes for this passage. In opposition to this, it could be argued that the mentioning of $\sigma\tau\rho\acute{\epsilon}\phi\omega$ is inconsequential to the argumentation of this passage (especially if the first view is taken) and that the author of the Fourth Gospel is not, himself, using the word, but he is just quoting the Isaiah passage. In

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 444–45.

¹³⁹ Hollenbach, “Lest they should turn and be forgiven: Irony,” *Bible Translator* 34 (1983): 312–21. The following discussion is heavily dependent upon his article.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 314.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 313 (italics added).

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 316.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 317.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 318. Since irony is marked only in English by tone of voice, it might be better to clearly explain the meaning so readers will understand it. This is what the translator of the LXX did when they changed the imperatives of the Hebrew to a description of the people. Therefore, Hollenbach suggests the following translation: “He had blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, because of course the last thing they want is to see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart, and turn for me to heal them” (*ibid.*, 320).

response to the former, 12:39¹⁴⁵ and Hollenbach's hypothesis argues against $\sigma\tau\rho\acute{\epsilon}\phi\omega$ being an inconsequential word in this passage. This verse frames the discussion into a salvific context by the use of "believe." The argumentation is as follows: "The Jews refused to believe and repent and have hardened their minds and eyes to the signs of Jesus."¹⁴⁶ The inclusion of the statement in 12:42 that many believed gives an "implicit appeal to believe" to 12:37–40.¹⁴⁷ The closing words of John 12:40 discuss "turning" and "healing." Taken as irony, these words are a condemnation to the Jews who have hardened their hearts and blinded their eyes because they did not want to repent and be healed.¹⁴⁸ The latter argument, that the author of the Fourth Gospel is not actually employing the term himself, is a little uncertain. While it is true that the Fourth Gospel is referring to Isa 6:10, it is not a quote from the Hebrew nor the Septuagint. The Septuagint used a different (though related) word; the Hebrew has many differences from this reference. Therefore, the author is probably reciting the verse from memory,¹⁴⁹ paraphrasing it for convenience, or making the original authorial intent (irony) clearer. Regardless, they are his own words that occur in John 12:40, not a slavish copying of Isa 6:10. Ridderbos paraphrases the final words of John 12:40 (on turning and healing) as "to repentance and healing."¹⁵⁰

Abiding in the Vine: John 15:1–5

The exegetical issues involved with this passage are too numerous for a detailed discussion and interaction with scholarship. However, while these will be avoided, an attempt to discern if this passage contains the word-picture of repentance will still occur. Three aspects of these verses could possibly portray the concept of repentance. (1) Does the concept of "bears fruit" allude to John the Baptist's teaching in Matt 3:8? (2) Can the idea of being cleansed be related to repentance? (3) Does the phrase "apart from me" mean the opposite of repentance (turning away from God, not away from sin)?

The relationship between the Synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel cannot be examined in detail at this time. Scholarship has essentially come to the

¹⁴⁵ "For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again."

¹⁴⁶ If Hollenbach's hypothesis were to be rejected, then the argument would be: "The Jews were unable to believe because God has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts. If God had not done this then they would have . . ." While the word that would be expected in the Fourth Gospel is "believed," instead it says "turned."

¹⁴⁷ So Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 485.

¹⁴⁸ Again, if Hollenbach's hypothesis is rejected, then the end of the verse would be saying that I, Jesus (so Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 453, n2), would have healed them. This healing is ultimately a spiritual healing: that they would be able to see with their eyes and perceive with their hearts (it should also be noted that "heart," particularly in this context, should be understood as a reference to the seat of decision making: the mind).

¹⁴⁹ So Goodwin, "How Did John Treat His Sources?," 71.

¹⁵⁰ Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 445.

consensus that the Fourth Gospel is independent.¹⁵¹ However, several commentaries (like Morris) link the author of the Fourth Gospel as being a disciple of John the Baptist. This would leave the possibility that the author (and Jesus) could be drawing from John the Baptist's words. While the phrase appears to be functioning in the same way with the same meaning (see discussion above under Matt 3:8),¹⁵² this appears to be too far of a stretch to put any significant weight on it.

Can καθαίρειν be connected to repentance? In 15:2 it is used metaphorically, referring exclusively to pruning, with no moral or cultic imagery.¹⁵³ It is used differently in 15:3: here it does not refer to conversion. The λόγον is the reason for the disciples' purity: "this λόγος includes the forgiveness of sins, but does not refer specifically to it."¹⁵⁴ The theme of outward ritual purification (John 2:6; 3:35) may be held in contrast to this cleansing.¹⁵⁵ The last use of this word in the Fourth Gospel was in 13:10.

In 15:5, being "apart from" the vine is contextually the opposite of "abiding." The idea of being apart from the vine contains slight connotations to being the opposite of repentance. Repentance is the turning away from sin and is demonstrated by bearing fruit (Matt 3:8); abiding is remaining in God and is demonstrated by bearing fruit. Regarding φέρωνκαρπών in John 15, Bultmann says that it is not specifically missionary work, nor does it refer to success or reward; rather, "similarly to Matt. 3:8," it "signifies the evidence for vitality of faith."¹⁵⁶ Abiding appears to be the other side of the same coin as repentance: abiding is loyalty,¹⁵⁷ a remaining in God; repentance is turning away from sin. This final proposal is the most helpful source in seeing the concept of repentance. Again, repentance is linked with faith.

¹⁵¹ Johannine independence is claimed by most major commentators. Dependence upon Mark is supported by Charles K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2d ed. and E. K. Lee, "St Mark and the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 3 (1956–57): 50–58.

¹⁵² Along with Matt 3:8, Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 997, lists the following as texts from the Gospels that refer to this concept: Matt 3:10; 7:16–20; 12:33; Luke 3:8–9; 6:43–44; 13:6–9; probably Mk 11:14; 12:2.

¹⁵³ Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 533, n3–4. The word can have a moral meaning (Barrett, *John*, 473), but it does not here.

¹⁵⁴ Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 534, n5. See Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 516, who says the cleaning refers to church discipline.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 996–97.

¹⁵⁶ Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 532, n6. While various proposals have been put forth (fruit equals obedience or new converts or love or Christian character), many narrow the meaning of fruit too much. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 517, contextually links "fruit" to the "product of effective prayer" and includes many of the proposals mentioned. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 997, calls it "moral fruit."

¹⁵⁷ Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 535, n1. *Ibid.*, 535, n2 continues: "Thus μένειν is not identical with the ὑπομονή that is demanded elsewhere in the NT, although the μένειν of faith certainly includes ὑπομονή." Further, "Μένειν means holding on loyally to the decision once taken, and one can hold on to it only by continually going through it again" (*ibid.*, 536).

Conclusion

Seven texts (or motifs) have been analyzed to discover that the concept of repentance is present in the Fourth Gospel. Not all of the arguments are equally convincing. Here is the list of arguments in order from the strongest to the weakest:

- (1) The Fourth Gospel's Paraphrase of Isa 6:10: John 12:40
- (2) Stop Sinning: 5:14 (8:11)
- (3) Light and Darkness Motif: 3:19–21; 8:12; 9:5
- (4) The Snake in the Wilderness: John 3:14–15 and Num 21:4–9
- (5) Born Again or Born from Above: 3:3–5
- (6) Belief and Obedience: 3:36
- (7) Abiding in the Vine: John 15:1–5

The Abiding Passage in John 15 contained three possible arguments, but only one stood the test: “apart from me” is conceptually the opposite of repentance. In John 3:36, obedience was described as the outcome of both belief and repentance. While the discussion of being “born from above” has its exegetical difficulties, the translation “from above” over “again” or “anew” and Ezekiel 36 being an OT background are a fairly solid foundation to understanding the passage. Since regeneration is the overall theme, of which repentance is a part, the concept is contained within this passage. This is, admittedly, a veiled reference to our concept. The background text to John 3:14–15 fairly clearly contains the picture of Israelites repenting. The Numbers 21 text is specifically the background text and there are no reservations in commending a reference to repentance in this text. The light and darkness motif contains the third strongest argument for repentance. The picture of those in unbelief fleeing the Light and those who believe coming to the Light portrayed our previously understood definition of repentance. The analysis of this passage concluded that every time the Fourth Gospel mentions believing (after 3:21), the concept of repentance should be kept in mind.¹⁵⁸ The man whom Jesus healed in John 5 and then told to “stop sinning” contained our second strongest connection to repentance. Finally, the Johannine paraphrase of Isa 6:9–10 actually contains the term used for repentance in the Septuagint.

While repentance cannot be said to be an overwhelming theme of the Fourth Gospel, it should not be considered absent. Those claiming that since the Fourth Gospel contains no references to repentance then Christians should avoid using the word in evangelism and gospel presentations have not studied close enough the conceptual links to repentance in the Fourth Gospel. Ironside concluded that John “does not ignore the ministry of repentance because he stresses the importance of

¹⁵⁸ Since the Fourth Gospel contains the verb πιστεύω ninety-eight times, this is surely a conclusion worth noting. Note James E. Rosscup's conclusion (“The Relation of Repentance to Salvation and the Christian Life,” [unpublished paper], 17; cited from Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 3,” 14), that John's “use of only ‘believe’ can have a reasonable solution. To him, believing draws into its attitude all that it means to repent, to change the attitude in a turn from the old life to Christ and the new life.”

faith. . . . he shows to repentant souls the simplicity of salvation, of receiving eternal life, through a trusting in Him who, as the true light, casts light on every man, thus making manifest humanity's fallen condition and the need of an entire change of attitude toward self and toward God."¹⁵⁹

Appendix 1

Μετάνοια = 22 times	Μετανοέω = 34 times
Matt 3:8, 11	Matt 3:2; 4:17; 11:20, 21; 12:41
Mark 1:4	Mark 1:15; 6:12
Luke 3:3, 8; 5:32; 15:7; 24:47	Luke 10:13; 11:32; 13:3, 5; 15:7, 10; 16:30; 17:3, 4
Acts 5:31; 11:18; 13:24; 19:4; 20:21; 26:20	Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 26:20
Rom 2:4	2 Cor 12:21
2 Cor 7:9, 10	Rev 2:5 (twice), 16, 21 (twice), 22; 3:3, 19; 9:20, 21; 16:9, 11
2 Tim 2:25	
Heb 6:1, 6; 12:17	
2 Pet 3:9	

Μετάνοια and μετανοέω occur a total of fifty-six times.¹⁶⁰

Μεταμέλομαι occurs six times: Matt 21:29, 32; 27:3, 2 Cor 7:8 (twice), Heb 7:21.

Appendix 2

Μετανοέω (NASB 1995)	Μετανοέω (NLT 1997)	Μετάνοια (NASB 1995)	Μετάνοια (NLT 1997)
Repent (26)	Repent (7)	Repentance (22)	Turn from your sins and turn to God (10)
Repented (5)	Turn from your sins and turn to God (6)		Repentance (3)
Repents (3)	Turn back/away (4)		Turn from sins (3)
	Turn from sins (3)		Turn away (2)
	Turn (to me) (3)		Returns to God (1)
	Repentance (2)		Repent (1)
	Repents (2)		Change (1)
	Repented (2)		Change your ways (1)
	Turn to God (1)		

¹⁵⁹ Ironside, *Except Ye Repent*, 38.

¹⁶⁰ Note that Wilkin, "Repentance and Salvation, Part 3," 11, says that they occur fifty-eight times. In "Does Your Mind Need Changing?," 39, he abridges that to fifty-five times. Luter, "Repentance," 673, says they occur fifty-eight times. Chamberlain, *The Meaning of Repentance*, 31, says fifty-six times and that μεταμέλομαι occurs five times.

	Turn from indifference (1)		
	Ask forgiveness (1)		
	Returns to God (1)		
	If you don't (1)		

Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 3,” 8, said: “It seems that ‘repentance’ as a translation for *metanoia* (and *metamelomai*) will probably be with us for a long time.” Less than a decade later, translation committees have decided to evaluate each occurrence of these Greek words. Their conclusions, however, will not be to Wilkin’s liking.

Appendix 3

	σῶζω	σωτηρία ¹⁶¹	σωτήρ	πιστεύω	πίστις	χάρις ¹⁶²
Matthew	15	0	0	11	8	0
Mark	14	1 ¹⁶³	0	14 ¹⁶⁴	5	0
Luke	17	6	2	9	11	9
John	6	1	1	98	0	4
Acts	13	7	2 ¹⁶⁵	37	15	17
Romans	8	5	0	21	40	24
Colossians	0	0	0	0	5	5
Hebrews	2	7	0	2	32	7
Revelation	0	3	0	0	4	2

¹⁶¹ Or σωτήριον, which also means salvation.

¹⁶² Or χάριν.

¹⁶³ Note that there is one significant textual variant in Mark 16.

¹⁶⁴ Four are possible textual variants from Mark 16.

¹⁶⁵ On a side note, the word κύριος occurs 107 times in Acts.