
The New Living Translation of Jesus’ repent-or-perish warning is a good place to start the next discussion:

(2) ‘Do you think those Galileans were worse sinners than all the other people from Galilee?’ Jesus asked. ‘Is that why they suffered? (3) Not at all! And you will perish, too, unless you repent of your sins and turn to God. (4) And what about the eighteen people who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them? Were they the worst sinners in Jerusalem? (5) No, and I tell you again that unless you repent, you will perish, too.’ (Luke 13:2-5 NLT.)

The Greek word for repent in this passage is meta-noeo. It has two meanings. Thayer’s Lexicon says it means either change your mind (in the sense of a decision) or “to change one’s mind for better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one’s past sins.”

Metanoeo was used in the Greek Septuagint Bible to translate a Hebrew word in Isaiah 46:8 meaning “a complete change in attitude, not just a change in mind about specific acts.” (G.W. Bromiley, The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (Eerdman’s 1995) at 136.) Likewise, in the Greek Apocrypha predating the New Testament, metanoeo was “frequently used...in the sense of complete change of one’s life and a complete turning from sin and to the ways (or laws) of God.” Id. Bromiley points out that in the 56 times it appears in the New Testament, with rare exception, meta-noeo has the “full sense of a complete change in one’s way of life” and “spiritual change implied in a sinner’s return to God.” Id.
With this prior usage, Dunn says “the call expressed in the Greek term *metanoeo* [by Jesus]...would have initially been heard as a reiteration of the call of the prophets to turn back to God, that is, by implication, from a *life in breach of God’s commandments.*” (Dunn, *Jesus Remembered:* 499.)

The Baptist scholar, John Broadus, in his classic *Commentary on Matthew,* explained *metanoeo* by contrasting it with other related words. The word *metamelomai* “expresses regret, and may or may not be followed by change of purpose and conduct.” However, it is “quite different from the word *metanoeo* used to denote repentance unto life.”^1 Hence, the contrast proves *metanoeo* means more: a change of behavior.

Hence, the NLT correctly chose to translate *metanoeo* in Luke 13:5 as “repent of your sins and turn to God.”

Besides word-definition, what in the context supports the NLT’s decision? Jesus is talking about the tragedy which befell the Galileans. Eighteen of them died due to a falling tower. The audience thought this proved these eighteen were the *worst sinners.* The audience then inferred that because nothing so tragic happened to them, then they were not the worst of sinners and hence safe. They thought they were on the path to eternal life. Jesus says this is misreading the situation. Unless you repent from sin, you too will perish — everlastingly. Jesus is saying the Galileans were not the *worst of sinners.* The audience members too were *sinners who likewise needed to repent from sin.* And thus Jesus’ point is they will be in the same boat as anyone else who is a sinner who has not repented from sin.

Of course, this passage merely repeats the heaven-maimed or hell-whole passage. (Mark 9:42-47.) That clearly meant you had only two choices: make a firm decision against sin and then successfully turn in the direction of that decision. Otherwise, you will perish everlastingly.

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Thus, there is little doubt that Jesus likewise has the same choice in mind when He says “repent or perish.” Jesus is directing that one must repent from sin as the means of avoiding perishing everlastingly. Mere repentance in the sense of a mental belief change is not what Jesus means in context. For in this passage in Luke 13, Jesus’ audience did not have a wrong idea about faith or about Jesus. Rather, they had sinned. Jesus said they were not addressing this problem. They had a wrong doctrine on what tragedies imply about their own sin. Jesus said tragedies to others implied nothing about the acceptability of their own lives. Jesus’ audience thought only the Galileans who were killed were sinners because of tragedies that befell them. Jesus said not so.

Hence, the audience’s problem was their sin (and smugness about it), not their lack of belief.

Jesus was not saying anything radically new. Psalm 32:1, 5 repeats this principle of repentance from sin for forgiveness as the first step to salvation.

(1) Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered....(5) I acknowledged my sin unto thee, And mine iniquity did I not hide: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto Jehovah; And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah

Other Parallel Passages

The audience’s assumption about the Galileans is similar to the pride of the Pharisee in the Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee.2

In that parable, the Pharisee compares himself to horrid sinners. In that light, the Pharisee thought he was not half-bad. The Pharisee then interpreted this to mean he must be good in God’s eyes by comparison. Yet, Jesus insisted that

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2. For full discussion on this parable, see chapter entitled “The Repentant Goes Home Justified” on page 27.
God does not grade *sin* on a sliding scale of comparisons. Instead, Jesus taught only the person who was repenting from sin — the publican in the parable — goes home *justified*. Only the publican who repents from sin is right with God.

Thus, when confronting the audience who thinks these Galileans are the worst of sinners, Jesus confronts them about their pride. It is the same kind of pride Jesus exposed in the Pharisee in the Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee. Both the audience in Luke 13 and the Pharisee in the parable reject personal repentance because they smugly think they are righteous “by comparison.” Jesus warns that pride leads to a *shallow level of self-examination for sin*. Such shallowness will lead to perishing everlastingly. Why?

Because a *shallow self-examination* due to pride means you will *never detect the sin you need to identify* and then *repent from*.

Thus, Jesus was giving the same lesson to these people about ‘repent or perish’ that Jesus gave in the lesson about the Publican and the Pharisee. You cannot be right with God by making comparisons to others. You cannot infer you are righteous because nothing *bad* has happened to you yet.

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**Fable Of Cheap Grace Insists Repent-Or-Perish Means Nothing More Than Belief**

If Jesus means we must repent *from sin or perish*, Jesus is saying the same thing He says elsewhere. Jesus elsewhere said we must mentally cut off body parts ensnaring us in sin or go to hell whole. (Mark 9:42-47.)

If, instead, one assumes a belief-change *alone* saves you (as cheap grace doctrine teaches), this process of mentally cutting off body parts would be *more* than just faith in Jesus or His work. If so, then Jesus’ repent-or-perish warning destroys the prevalent doctrine of belief alone as what saves. Absent repentance from sin (which is more than just faith), Jesus would be saying you will perish in hell.
What do the cheap grace fabulists do to make one think repentance in Jesus ‘repent-or-perish’ warning is simply saying ‘have faith or otherwise perish’?

First, Mark 9:42-47 (heaven-maimed or hell-whole) is ignored.

Second, these fabulists erase the primary meaning that repentance ordinarily means a decision to change one’s behavior about sin. These fabulists are intent to convince Christians that a change to the correct belief about Jesus or His work on the cross is the only repentance in the mind necessary to avoid perishing everlastingly.

Thus, for the cheap grace fabulist, the word repentance — as Jesus supposedly used the term — was nothing more than a mental process. Once the fabulists of cheap grace embed this meaning, they then surreptitiously substitute faith as the meaning of repentance. Then they too can quote Jesus saying ‘repent or perish,’ but in their mind, with repent so redefined, Jesus supposedly means ‘have a change in belief or perish’ — have ‘faith or be lost.’

To lead Christians to this conclusion, the fabulist of cheap grace will employ three methods, as we shall see in the example of the writings of the famous John Piper:

• The fabulist will never tell their listener that the primary usage of Jesus was in 13 of 20 times where Jesus used the word repentance that its meaning was a change in mind and behavior about sin (not a change in faith, belief, etc.).

• The fabulist will only cite from passages where the word repentance is ambiguous in the sentence.

• The fabulist will never even tell Christians there is a second primary meaning to repentance: a decision to abandon a certain behavior — a meaning distinct from the alternative definition of change in mind. The fabulist will never advise the Christian in the pew that the dictionary refutes their argument.

Thus, what the Fable of Cheap Grace will do is try to draw on ambiguous passages and insist there is a possibility that Jesus means only one aspect to the word repentance —
an aspect which has a quality in common with faith — a mental process. Then the objective is to draw the listener to think repentance can be equated with faith. From this groundwork, then they insist repent or perish means nothing more than have faith or perish. And thus they have drawn up their case for faith alone for salvation from a passage refuting their doctrine. For nothing is so inimical to the faith alone doctrine than Jesus’ simple expression: repent or perish.

Thus, the fabulists do not tolerate that repentance in Luke 13:2-5 has any implication of a sorrow about sin unto reformation of behavior. Jesus in context really means you must make a change mentally in the direction of your life from sin to obedience or you will perish everlastingly. The gospel of cheap grace cannot tolerate such a meaning.

This explains why, as we discuss next, that the fabulists of cheap grace are willing to go to any length necessary to rationalize repentance means only faith. We review this next as exemplified in the writings of the popular John Piper.

John Piper: Claims Repentance Is Merely A Change Of Mind

John Piper is a leading Calvinist commentator. On April 19, 2006, he wrote Thoughts on Jesus’ Demand to Repent. It is a comment on Luke 13:2-5 as well as several other quoted passages where Jesus mentions repentance. Piper will conclude that because the Greek word metanoeo supposedly only means change in mind, we can understand Jesus calling us only to have a new view of Jesus (faith) or perish. Jesus is supposedly not asking us to reform our thoughts about sin, let alone our behavior.

Piper’s argument deserves very careful analysis. For Piper’s argument is familiar to all evangelicals. Many others before him said the same thing. The mind-change hook is what we all have used to square ‘faith alone’ with what otherwise would be a very demanding principle for salvation — repent or perish.

Let’s start the analysis of Piper’s article by first pointing out what it omits.

Key Omissions in Piper’s Analysis. Flagrantly absent from Piper’s quotations from Jesus about repentance is Mark 9:42-47. This is the clearest statement by Jesus about repentance. Even though Jesus did not use the Greek word metanoeo for repentance in that passage, the message of heaven-maimed or hell-whole in Mark 9:42-47 is about repentance. It erases any mystery about what Jesus means by repent or perish in Luke 13:5. Thus, any analysis on Jesus’ usage of the Greek word translated as repentance which omits discussion of the heaven-maimed or hell-whole passage is defective.

Moreover, this is not only because Mark 9:42-47 explains repentance. Rather, that Marcan passage is expressed synonymously to Luke 13:5. For what is the difference between repent or perish and heaven-maimed or hell-whole? They are mirror statements by Jesus. They have the identical antithesis, which is a common Biblical method of making meaning clear. Thus, it is a travesty to never explain Luke 13:5 by making appropriate reference to Mark 9:42-47.

Second, and most important, Piper never quotes a dictionary on classical Greek on the standard meanings of metanoeo. One of the most commonly used Greek dictionaries in Protestant seminaries is Thayer’s Greek Lexicon. It defines the Greek word involved (metanoeo) as either:

- “change in the mind;” or
- “to change one’s mind for better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one’s past sins.”

It is in particular the latter definition that Piper omits, which is troubling, as we shall see.
Piper’s Argument. Piper lays out his proposition plainly:

One of my concerns is to show that repentance in Jesus’ message is not behavior but the inner change that gives rise to new God-centered, Christ-exalting behavior.

[R]epentance is an internal change of mind and heart rather than mere sorrow for sin or mere improvement of behavior.

Let’s diagram Piper’s point by means of Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repentance Means</th>
<th>Repentance Supposedly Does Not Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. “inner change”</td>
<td>1. “change in behavior”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. “internal change of mind and heart”</td>
<td>2. “improvement of behavior”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. “internal change of mind and heart”</td>
<td>3. “sorrow for sin”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How does Piper prove it is none of the meanings on the right side of Table 1? Piper does so by committing the cardinal sin of a commentator.

Cardinal Sin of A Commentator. As discussed previously, the word in Greek at issue — metanoeo — which we see translated as repentance — always has an alternative meaning of “to change one’s mind for better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one’s past sins.” (Thayer's Greek Definitions.)

We likewise saw previously that Bromiley in The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (Eerdmans’: 1995) said metanoeo was used prior to Christ to mean a “complete change of one’s life and a complete turning from sin and to the ways (or laws) of God.” In the New Testament, with rare
exception, Bromiley said *metanoeo* had the “full sense of a complete change in one’s way of life” and “spiritual change implied in a sinner’s return to God.”

In other words, the word *metanoeo* in Greek has each of the three meanings which Piper denies it ever has. Thus, contrary to Piper’s claim, repentance *can* mean a decision to reform one’s behavior and actually in sorrow reforming one’s behavior. An honest commentator must tell the audience of that possibility even if you don’t want to do so. You must then defend your alternative reading. Any other approach is dishonest.

Yet, by Piper denying this possibility even exists for any one of these other three meanings, he makes it appear the *New Living Translation* of Luke 13:5 engages in blatant mis-translation. The NLT adds that the repentance involved is from sin and toward obedience. Hence, even though Piper claims repentance cannot possibly mean the propositions in #1, #2 and #3 of column 2 above, these propositions are precisely the meanings that the Greek word simultaneously can convey. Yet Piper suppresses and denies that reality.

Thus, Piper — despite all his fame and his awareness of how many people trust his every word — committed the cardinal sin of a commentator on Scripture: Piper never told the reader that his statements were directly contradicted by rudimentary Greek dictionaries and every knowledgeable expert!

**Piper’s Proof.** Piper does attempt to justify his conclusion from a dictionary that the only meaning of the Greek word involved is a change of one’s mind.

However, Piper does so in a completely non-conventional, and inappropriate manner. What is his approach?

Piper breaks the Greek word in two to its constituent parts. Then Piper tells you what those parts — when used as words by themselves — mean in a standard Greek dictionary. Then Piper claims when you put the two different parts
together and add their independent meanings together, you then have the basic meaning of the word at issue — metanoeo — which is only a change in the mind.

However, the meanings of the constituent parts do not tell you always the meaning of the word when the parts are combined. For example, the word subtraction does not have the meaning of its two constituent parts. If you define them separately, they mean under (sub) and hand(le) (tractare). It would be foolish to then tell others the word subtraction means to under hand. Yet, that is precisely the logic of Piper. It is the sole method he employs to give definition to the word metanoeo which is the Greek word at issue. Piper writes:

First, the meaning of the Greek word behind the English “repent” (metanoeo) points in this direction. It has two parts: meta and noeo. The second part (noeo) refers to the mind and its thoughts and perceptions and dispositions and purposes. The first part (meta) is a prefix that regularly means movement or change. So the basic meaning of repent is to experience a change of the mind’s perceptions and dispositions and purposes.

This is highly misleading. No mention is made of the Greek dictionary definitions of the whole word metanoeo when the two constituent parts are combined. Why?

Because the primary usage by Jesus of metanoeo was overwhelmingly to mean a decision to change from sinful behavior to good behavior. But if the price to avoid perishing were repentance of this type, it would offend the Gospel of Cheap Grace. This dangerous implication is precisely what Piper is resisting. Thus, Piper deliberately ignores this meaning. Furthermore, he not only pretends it does not exist, but Piper also blatantly denies it is one possible meaning!

Yet, repentance over sin is one of metanoeo’s two primary meanings in any standard Greek dictionary. To repeat, while the word metanoeo can mean “change in the mind,” its other primary meaning — and the one Jesus typically
intended (as we shall see) — was “to change one’s mind for better, *heartily to amend with abhorrence of one’s past sins.*” (Thayer).

Below in Table 2 is a list of every one of twenty passages where Jesus (including the ‘Revelation of Jesus Christ’) uses the word *metanoeo*. In 13 of the 20 passages, it meant *sorrowful change from sin* in the same sentence — the second dictionary meaning of ‘deciding and turning from one’s sin.’ *Yet, seven times it was ambiguous* within the sentence.

**TABLE 2. Repentance Passages (Gk. Metanoeo)**

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<tr>
<td>Matthew 4:17</td>
<td>From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, <em>Repent:</em> for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.</td>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 11:20</td>
<td>Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they <em>repented</em> not:</td>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 11:21; Luke 10:13</td>
<td>Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have <em>repented</em> long ago in sackcloth and ashes.</td>
<td>From sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 12:41; Luke 11:32</td>
<td>The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they <em>repented at the preaching of Jonas</em>; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.</td>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark 6:12</td>
<td>And they went out, and preached that men should <em>repent</em>.</td>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 5:32</td>
<td>I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to <em>repentance</em>.</td>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 13:2,5</td>
<td><em>Repent</em> or perish.</td>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 15:7</td>
<td>I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one <em>sinner that repenteth</em>, more than over ninety and nine <em>just persons, which need no repentance</em>.</td>
<td>From sin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<tr>
<td>Luke 15:10</td>
<td>Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.</td>
<td>From sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 17:3</td>
<td>Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.</td>
<td>From sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 17:4</td>
<td>And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.</td>
<td>From sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. 2:5</td>
<td>Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.</td>
<td>From sin (for believer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. 2:16</td>
<td>Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them [sic: you] with the sword of my mouth.</td>
<td>From sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. 2:22</td>
<td>Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.</td>
<td>From sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. 3:3</td>
<td>Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.</td>
<td>From sin (for a believer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. 3:19</td>
<td>As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.</td>
<td>From sin (for a believer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. 9:20</td>
<td>And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk:</td>
<td>From sin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
John Piper: Claims Repentance Is Merely A Change Of Mind

What does Piper do with these thirteen problematical passages? After all, the case is overwhelming that Jesus means by repentance that it is a decision to turn from sin.

Piper’s response is to selectively base his discussion solely upon ambiguous passages.

Piper selects four of the seven ambiguous verses listed above to quote in full to make his case. He quotes them with a lead in that “here are some thoughts to help make the meaning more plain.” However, quoting the ambiguous passages, as he does of Matthew 4:17, Luke 5:32, Luke 13:2-5, and Matthew 12:41, is precisely how to make things less plain. It is how one would deliberately obscure and make Jesus’ meaning less apparent.

What makes obvious Piper’s intention is that Piper selects none of the 13 other passages where Jesus uses the word for repentance to mean a decision to turn from sin.

For example, repent or perish in Luke 13:2-5 is ambiguous if you just look at that single sentence. You have to look to the context asking: does repentance mean faith as the mental change or turning from sin? It is unclear without

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<tr>
<td>Rev. 9:21</td>
<td><em>Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.</em></td>
<td>From sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. 16:9</td>
<td>And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.</td>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. 16:11</td>
<td>And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.</td>
<td>From sin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20 passages

13 - From sin
7 - Ambiguous
the context. Thus, Piper elects to choose just these words “repent or perish” along with three other ambiguous verses. Then Piper ignores all of the 13 passages where Jesus clearly means by repentance a *decision-change about sin*, not *faith*.

This quote selection is no accident by Piper. Look at the selectivity of Piper’s choices in Table 3 below. Was Piper really trying to make Jesus’ point “more plain”? Or was Piper trying to exploit ambiguity in a few passages for the purpose of ignoring Jesus’ *true* meaning, thereby protecting the fable of cheap grace?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3. Selectivity Of John Piper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous Passages (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotes in full 4 of 7 or 57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is the purpose of this selectivity? Obviously, such selectivity exploits the reader’s trust in Piper. The faithful readers could never imagine Piper would be aware that there are numerous Scriptural counter-examples on *metanoeo’s* meaning. They could not believe Piper is aware that *metanoeo* has any meaning other than *change in mind*. So if Piper says these few passages will help make Jesus meaning ‘more plain,’ the trusting reader would assume these are the clearest passages. The trusting reader would assume there are no passages that refute Piper’s assertion about *metanoeo’s* meaning. But this was totally deceptive argumentation.

Piper’s argumentation method proves how far the fabulists of cheap grace must go to sustain the public’s continued ignorance about Jesus’ central doctrine of repentance. Piper’s desperation, when confronted by the words of Jesus, is evident in how extraordinarily strained was his alleged proof.

**Piper Next Tries To Equate Repentance To Faith Alone.** Now that Piper has proven (in his mind) that repentance solely means *change in mind*, Piper is going to reveal the purpose behind that limited definition.
John Piper: Claims Repentance Is Merely A Change Of Mind

Piper slips in that this ‘change in mind’ (repentance) that Jesus requires for salvation is really just about seeing Jesus in a new way. As described next, this proposition is indistinguishable from saying repentance merely means faith in Jesus. Now we are beginning to see the agenda behind all of Piper’s preceding misleading presentation. Piper says:

Repenting means experiencing a change of mind that now sees God as true and beautiful and worthy of all our praise and all our obedience. This change of mind also embraces Jesus in the same way. We know this because Jesus said, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God.” Seeing God with a new mind includes seeing Jesus with a new mind.

Thus, instead of repentance being a decision to change one’s behavior, Piper says it is a change in the “mind” on how it “embraces” Jesus in a new way. It means we “see” Jesus “with a new mind.” We now treat Jesus as a person that is “true, beautiful and worthy of all our praise and all our obedience.” This ‘new mind’ about Jesus is obviously indistinguishable from someone now placing their faith in Jesus.

Hence, Piper has reduced “repent or perish” into having “faith or perish.”

Now we see how the Fable of the Cheap Grace Gospel continues to hold onto our minds. Piper’s claims are all too familiar to us. Piper is just the latest re-invention of an old saw about repentance being merely a change in your mind (akin or equal to faith). This is a device we were all taught early on to put in the bag of tricks to resolve difficult repentance passages from Jesus such as “repent or perish.”

However, let’s now move on to study one passage where Jesus’ meaning about the word repentance in Greek has absolutely no ambiguity. This finally should put an end to Piper’s claims, besides exposing how incomplete was his analysis.
What Is Repentance In Jesus’ Usage Elsewhere?

As noted above, Jesus says, “Unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:3.) The Greek present tense is used for repent. Thus, it really means “Unless you keep on repenting you will all likewise perish.”

What does Jesus mean by repentance here? In this single sentence, without looking at the context, it is somewhat vague. Does Jesus mean a mere change in your mind? Or is it instead a call to a change in your mind about sin?

Jesus clearly elsewhere uses the same Greek word in Luke 13:3 for repentance to mean a decision to turn from one’s evil ways. This was when Jesus said the people of Nineveh “repented” at the preaching of Jonah. (Matthew 12:41.) If we turn to the passage that Jesus is referencing, will we find their repentance was a mere change in their mind to believe in Yahweh? Or was it a decision to turn from sin? What did Jesus mean by the simple word repent in Matthew 12:41?

Well, Jesus was summarizing an event in Scripture where the scope of the mental change is clearly identified. Whether repentance for the Ninevites meant merely faith or a decision to turn from sin is clearly addressed.

When we go to Jonah 3:4-10, we find the Bible says that when Jonah preached, the people of Nineveh gave heed, were sorry, and turned from their evil ways. (Jonah 3:8,10.) Let’s read the passage in depth, for their conduct is what Jesus called “repentance.”

And he made proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water; (8) but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and beast, and let them cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from
the violence that is in his hands. (9) Who knoweth whether God will not turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? (10) And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil which he said he would do unto them; and he did it not. Jonah 3:7-10 ASV.

Please also note how in this same passage that God’s “repentance” involved a change of His mind about doing a deed. This proves that Thayer’s dictionary definition is somewhat too narrow. Repentance is slightly broader, meaning a decision in the mind to change one’s behavior. It can be a decision away from sin or from any kind of behavior, such as when God repents of a course of conduct He otherwise intended to perform.

Regardless, this passage in Jonah proves that this “turning” from evil by the Ninevites is what Jesus meant by repentance by the Ninevites. This tells us Jesus intended the word for repentance in Greek in Matthew 12:41 to mean a decision in one’s mind to turn from sin. Jesus did not mean by repentance the simple concept of faith alone. Thus, this is an example overlooked by Piper. It serves as a counter-example to his assertion. This study proves Thayer’s definition was correct that repentance has a primary meaning that includes deciding to turn from sin out of abhorrence for it.

Conclusion

Thus, we have carefully examined the simple statement from Jesus on repent-or-perish. Jesus said:

No, and I tell you again that unless you repent, you will perish, too.’ (John 13:5)
In response, the Gospel of Cheap Grace, in particular its advocate Piper, insisted that the word *repent* here has no cost element. It simply means we must embrace Jesus with a new mind that sees Him as good, beautiful, true and worthy of obedience. In a word, we are supposedly only to have ‘faith in Jesus or we will perish.’

However, we saw this passage on “repent or perish” exactly parallels Jesus’ warning that you can go to *heaven-maimed or hell-whole* in Mark 9:42-47. You can repent — maim yourself of the body part ensnaring you in sin — or you will perish in hell eternally. It’s an altogether obvious parallel of two identical antitheses: *repent or perish = heaven-maimed or hell-whole*.

We also saw the dictionary definition from Thayer and others that says the Greek word for *repent* means not simply a change in the mind, but also a decision for the better, where one abhors a specific sin henceforth.

Finally, we saw Jesus unquestionably used this word for *repentance* in other passages to describe the decision to turn from sin made by the Ninevites.

Therefore, it is beyond any serious question that Jesus means by “repent or perish” in Luke 13:5 that you can go to “heaven maimed or hell whole.” Jesus *specifically rejects that grace is without personal cost*. Rather, as Jesus did elsewhere, He taught again here that salvation comes at the cost of renouncing all that holds you back from obedience to God. Salvation is not by faith *alone*. Thus, Jesus is teaching you, if you will listen, that the most popular gospel of today is a *false gospel*. It is not His way. Jesus’ Way is bluntly ‘repent or perish.’