

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT REPENTANCE

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 Pet 3:9)

As sin has been a part of the human condition since the garden of Eden, so also has God's demand for repentance. As we look at repentance we are most interested in how it relates to what God requires of us to obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, and yet we must understand that God's demand for men to repent predates the coming of John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and even the current dispensation. In Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the newly built temple in Jerusalem according to 1 Kings 8:46-50, special request is made for the people of Israel that God might restore the people in the day they sin, he punishes them, and they repent. Indeed, the message of the prophets of old was a plea to the people to repent so that they might avoid the coming evil day. "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways," says the Lord GOD. "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin." (Ezek.18:30) God has always demanded repentance unto blessing!

When John the Baptist comes on the scene, as we read in the gospels, the message is clear and unmistakable, "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matt. 3:1-2) And again, "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance". (Matt. 3:8) The message of Jesus himself was the same, for we read, "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" (Matt.4:7). This message of repentance is strung throughout Jesus' preaching of the coming kingdom until he would finally tell his Apostles after his own resurrection, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke 24:46-47)

That preaching of repentance beginning at Jerusalem is recorded for us in Acts 2. As Peter convicted his audience of killing their own Lord and The Christ, we are told that they were pricked in their hearts and asked of Peter what is was they must do.

Peter responded, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38) This message of repentance and remission of sins continues through the book of Acts and we see that on Solomon's porch Peter would again proclaim, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19)

This was the message to the house of Israel, as they would find salvation in Christ, but the same message was set forth, to the Gentiles. After Peter explained his work with the house of Cornelius in Acts chapter 11, we are told that "they glorified God saying, 'Then God has also granted the Gentiles repentance to life.'" (Acts 11:18). Later, when Paul would stand before the learned men of Athens, he would declare by the direction of the Holy Spirit, "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men to repent" (Acts. 17:30). God had, in times past, allowed the nations of the earth to go their own way but now a summons was being sent forth in the preaching of the gospel and an important part of that summons was, "repent!"

Clearly, the people we read about in these passages must have known what repentance was, or else they could not have possibly responded to such a demand from heaven. It does appear that in our day many have lost an understanding of just what repentance is. Many think that repentance is being sorry for the commission of sin. It is certainly true that one cannot repent of sin without having what the Scriptures call "godly sorrow." When we look into God's word we see that repentance is not so much sorrow itself but rather the natural outgrowth of godly sorrow. In 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 Paul, in referring to things he had previously said to the brethren in Corinth, made this point: "Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produced repentance to salvation, not to be regretted, but the sorrow of the world produced death." The sorrow some people feel for sins committed, causes them to repent. I have witnessed people on the other hand, who, facing the sins of their lives, did not repent but sank to the depths of despair and hopelessness. This is what Judas did when he realized what he had done. He was "remorseful" (Matt.27:3) but his remorse was not repentance unto life. It was worldly sorrow unto death.

Just as people mistake repentance for it's cause, people also mistake repentance for its result. Many believe the actual amending of ones ways to be repentance. In fact, this is the result of repentance. This point is made clear by John the Baptist's appeal to men to "bring forth fruit worthy of repentance." The deeds done were not repentance; they were the result of repentance.

If repentance is not remorse but the result of it, and not reformed action but the cause of

it, what is repentance? The word "repent," which signifies God's desire and demand of men, is from the greek work "metanoeo" which means "to think differently, or afterwards." The word therefore signifies a changing of the mind. There is a place in Scripture where we can read of the process of repentance within an individual even as it happens. That place is Luke 15:17-19. The prodigal (wasteful) son had squandered away his inheritance and gotten himself in the very bad position of feeding, and being envious of, unclean swine. Verse 17 says "he came to himself." He realized his situation, he was indeed sorry for what he had done. The actual repentance is in verses 18-19. Here the young man says "I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him 'Father I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" That is repentance! As one continues with the story, he sees this man do exactly what he had "changed his mind" to do. This is the fruit that is suitable to repentance.

My friend, Paul's words are still true, "God commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Our Lord is not slack in his promise to return, he is longsuffering. His patience provides time and opportunity for us to repent of our sins and turn to Him. Peter would say in 2 Pet.3:15, "and account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation." But we must understand that God's longsuffering is not eternal! We must seize the opportunity. The words of our Lord are as vital today as ever! The message for sinful men is still "repent!" Alien sinners still need to "repent and be baptized" and erring disciples still need to "Repent, therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you." Gods call to repentance is evidence of His love for us. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent." (Rev.3:19) Will you repent?

Dwayne Scribner

Dwayne Scribner, 113 Wade Lane, Texarkana, TX 75501
dscrib@clover.cleaf.com
