

The Call to Repentance

A Misunderstood Command

by
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Introduction:

1. A sermon on repentance is not popular with some in the Lord's church. When churches of Christ today place too much emphasis on "church growth", they may be overlooking the sin among the members (or new converts) in order to have a large membership.
2. Others have a wrong concept of repentance. Robert Turner tells the story about the woman who said that repentance is "what people do in the aisle"; she continued: "You believe in the seat, repent in the aisle, confess at the front, and are baptized in the baptistry" (from Plain Talk).
3. Some brethren believe that repentance is not turning from sin, but a penitent attitude only. (See Ronny Milliner, "Repentance" in *The Christian and Sin*. Keith Sharp, John Welch and Wayne Greeson, editors. Indianapolis, IN: Faith and Facts Press, 1993.)
4. Some preachers are preaching "progressive repentance" – the belief that a new Christian "progressively" stops their sinful relationship (like an unscriptural marriage).

I. THE CALL TO REPENTANCE.

A. A call (command) to the world.

1. Mt. 3:1-2; 4:17; Mk. 6:2; Lk. 13:3,5; 24:27; Ac. 2:38; 17:30.

B. A call (command) to the church.

1. Ac. 8:20-24; Rev. 2:1-7,12-17,18-29; 3:1-6,14-22

C. A call (command) to everyone (2 Pet. 3:9).

D. The command to repent is clear, what is involved in repentance is often misunderstood by man.

1. Many have their own idea of repentance.
2. Many have not searched the Bible to see what repentance involves; others know, but ignore it.

II. WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

A. Repentance defined.

1. The Greek *metamelomai* means “regret, remorse” (lit. concerned after); used 6X in the NT (Mt. 21:29, 32; 27:3; 2 Cor. 7:8 [2x]; Heb. 7:21). The Greek root word is *melei* meaning care or concern (Mt. 22:16; Mk. 4:38; Mk. 12:14; Lk. 10:40; Jn. 10:13; 12:6; Acts 18:17; 1 Cor. 7:21; 9:9; 1 Pet. 5:7).

a. Having remorse (care) could lead one to repentance, but, as in the case of Judas, it could leave one with only remorse.

b. The Greek *ametameletos* means “not repented of, unregretted”; used 2x in the NT (Rom. 11:29; 2 Cor. 7:10).

2. The Greek *metanoeo* (verb) and *metanoia* (noun) mean “a change of mind or purpose, afterthought”. The Greek root word is *nous* meaning mind.

a. *Metanoeo* is used 34x in the NT (Mt. 3:2; 4:17; 11:20-21; 12:41; Mk. 1:15; 6:12; Lk. 10:13; 11:32; 13:3, 5; 15:7, 10; 16:30; 17:3, 4; Ac. 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 26:20; 2 Cor. 12:21; Rev. 2:5 [2x], 16, 21 [2x], 22; 3:3, 19; 9:20, 21; 16:9, 11).

b. *Metanoia* is used 22x in the NT (Mt. 3:8, 11; Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3, 8; 5:32; 15:7; 24:47; Ac. 5:31; 11:18; 13:24; 19:4; 20:21; 26:20; Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:9, 10; 2 Tim. 2:25; Heb. 6:1, 6; 12:17; 2 Pet. 3:9).

c. The Greek *ametanoetos* means “without change of mind, impenitent, unrepentant”; used 1x in the NT (Rom. 2:5).

B. Repentance is not just ...

1. Regret. Some people have remorse and regret, but they do not repent. Examine the case of Judas (Mt. 27:3-5).

2. Fear. The Bible does emphasize godly fear (Eccl. 12:13; Psa. 36:1; Prov. 1:7; Ac. 10:34-35; Rom. 3:18). However, some people are scared but they do not repent. Examine the case of Felix (Ac. 24:25).

3. Conviction. Some people recognize and acknowledge their sin, but do not repent (Rom. 1:32). Examine the case of Pharaoh (Ex. 9:27) and Judas (Mt. 27:4).

4. Sorrow. Some people have a “sorrow of the world” (2 Cor. 7:10), but do not repent. This is the “sorry I got caught” feeling. Examine the case of Judas (Mt. 27:3-5).

5. Reformation. Reformation of life is necessary (Mt. 3:1ff; Lk. 3:7-8). But some people reform their lives for selfish reasons, not to obey God (that is, “godly sorrow” or “sorrow toward God”). Man must have the right motive when he repents (Mt. 12:41; Ac. 2:38; 17:30-31; Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:10; 2 Tim. 2:24-26). We are to repent of sin because it insults God (Ezek. 20:7; Psa. 51:4; Jas. 4:4), shames God, and grieves God (Ezek. 18:23,32).

6. Prayer. Some people pray, but continue living in sin (Prov.28:9).

7. Confession. Confessing sin is important (Psa. 32:1-5), but some people confess their sins and keep on sinning; they do not forsake them (Prov. 28:13; Isa. 55:7; Mt. 27:3-5). We do not “go forward to repent”. We “go forward” because we have had a change of mind (heart) and change of behavior.

8. Ceasing to do wrong. Some people stop the sin, but keep the “prize” (for example, stealing or adultery). When possible, we must give up and give back what does not belong to us (Lk. 19:8).

9. Assembling with the saints. Some people think that they can keep sinning as long as they keep assembling (1 Pet. 3:8-12).

10. “If” statements. Some people think that saying some catch-all statement like, “If I have sinned...”, will make them right (Psa. 51:1-3).

11. There is no forgiveness where there is no true repentance (Lk.17:3-4)! So, what is repentance?

C. Repentance involves ...

1. Regret (sorrow). Mt. 11:20,21; 27:3-5; 2 Cor. 7:8-10.

2. Resolve (determination). Mt. 21:29; 27:3-5; Lk. 15:7,10,18-20a.

3. Reformation (change). Mt. 3:8; 12:41 (Jon. 3:1-10); 21:29,32; Lk. 3:8; 1 Thess. 1:9; Ac. 3:19; 19:19; 26:20; 2 Cor. 12:21; Heb. 6:1; Rev. 2:5,21-22; 3:2-3; 9:20-21; 16:8-11.

4. Restoration (giving back). Mt. 27:3-5; Lk. 19:8.

5. Repentance is “a change of mind, produced by a godly sorrow, that results in a change of life”. Anything other than this is not Bible repentance! Also, repentance is not belief; it is different from belief (Mt. 21:32; Mk. 1:15; Acts 19:4; 20:21; Heb. 6:1).

6. Repentance contains three elements: the intellectual element (a change of mind); the emotional element (a change of feeling - sorrow for sin); and, the

volitional element (a change of conduct). All three elements must be present before repentance can take place.

7. Fundamentally, repentance means a change of mind that leads to a change in behavior (practice, conduct). If there has been no change in behavior or relationship, then there has been no true repentance.

a. Repentance demands that one cease from the sin! Note that what Matthew 12:41 calls repentance (in the case of Ninevites), Jonah 3:8-10 calls turning from evil. See also Matthew 21:28-29. On the other hand, some people refuse to repent because they refuse to turn from evil and stop the sin (2 Cor. 12:20-21; Rev. 9:20-21).

b. Bible passages that tie “fruits” with repentance show that repentance means change (Mt. 3:8, 10; Lk. 3:8-14). The change in one’s life is the “fruit” of repentance.

c. Bible passages that tie “works” with repentance show that repentance means change (Acts 26:20; Rev. 16:11; see Jonah 3:10 where “God saw their works”). The change in one’s life is the “work” of repentance.

d. Repentance has to do with change, primarily. The change brought about by repentance can either be stopping something that is sinful (this is most cases in the Bible), or starting something that is good (Rev. 2:5; see also Lk. 3:8-14).

e. Matthew 21:29 (the son who repented and went) and Matthew 27:3 (Judas who repented and brought back) show that the change in behavior that comes from repentance is immediate; it is not “progressive” as some claim.

f. The primary meaning of repentance is change. It does not always imply sinful activity. For example, there are several places in the OT where we are told that the Lord “repented” (Gen. 6:6-7; Ex. 32:14; Deut. 32:36; Judges 2:18; 1 Sam. 15:11, 35; 2 Sam. 24:16; 1 Chron. 21:15; Psa. 90:13; Psa. 135:14; Jer. 15:6; 26:13, 19; Joel 2:13-14; 3:9-10; 4:2; Amos 7:3, 6; Jonah 4:2). In some places, the Lord did not “repent” (Num. 23:19; Psa. 110:4; Jer. 20:16; Ezek. 24:14; Zech. 8:14; Rom. 11:29; Heb. 7:21). When the Lord “repented”, it does not mean that the Lord was sinning. It means that he changed his mind and what he planned to do because he saw mankind change something in their thinking or activity.

III. THE CHALLENGE IN REPENTANCE - WHY MANY DO NOT REPENT.

A. Repentance has been called the Bible's hardest commandment. Some try to change the demands of repentance.

B. Repentance is a challenge.

1. A challenge in our view of sin (remorse).

a. Consider the case of the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 7:10-11 who repented of the sin of condoning the fornicating brother:

- 1) “what earnest care it wrought in you” - they were diligent and eager to address the sin.
- 2) “what clearing of yourselves” - they wanted to “clear up” the sin.
- 3) “what indignation” - they were outraged over the sin.
- 4) “what fear” - they feared God's displeasure over the sin.
- 5) “what longing” - they yearned to see the sin removed.
- 6) “what zeal” - they were zealous to remove the sin.
- 7) “what avenging” - they had taken the necessary steps to punish the wrongdoer.

b. Are you willing to view sin for what it really is - an offence against God.

2. A challenge to self (resolve).

a. Mt.16:24; Lk.9:23; 14:25-35.

b. Are you willing to give up sin? When “self” is enthroned, Christ is dethroned!

3. A challenge in reformation.

a. Mt. 12:41; 21:28-29; Lk. 15:11-24; 2 Cor. 7:7-11.

b. Are you willing to demonstrate in action, what you are feeling?

4. A challenge in restitution.

a. Lev. 6:1-6 (see also Num. 5); 1 Sam. 5:1-5; Lk. 19:8; Mt. 5:21-24.

b. Are you willing to give back what does not rightly belong to you?

IV. CHARLATANS OF REPENTANCE.

A. False views of repentance have been applied by some in the church to unscriptural marriage, divorce and remarriage relationships. They say you don't have to get out of an unscriptural marriage when you are baptized. They say that repentance does not demand

that you separate from unlawful mate. In some places, they call it “progressive repentance”; that is, just believe in Jesus, get baptized, and stay in your unscriptural marriage until you “progressively” get out of it.

1. Note that in the OT, unlawful marriages were dissolved immediately, not progressively (Ezra 10:10-11; see also Neh. 13:23-30 and Mk. 6:18).

2. If, according to “progressive repentance”, you do not have to get out of an adulterous marriage, what other sins do you not have to stop? Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and ask yourself, do you have to stop fornication, idolatry, homosexuality, stealing, coveting, drinking, reviling, and extortion? If you have to stop these things immediately, then why not adultery? Read Colossians 3:6-9 and consider that Paul wrote about various sins (fornication included) and said, “put them all away...” (see also Eph. 4:22 - 5:5).

3. Simon the sorcerer is not an example of “progressive repentance”. He was not told to repent of still practicing sorcery. He was told to repent of the sin of wanting to buy with money the (apostolic) “gift of God” – the laying on hands (Acts 8:18-24).

B. False views of repentance have been applied by some in the church to institutionalism, instrumental music, premillennialism, and other false doctrines and practices. They say you don’t have to stop these erroneous practices and beliefs.

C. False views of repentance have been applied by some in the church to “continuous cleansing”. They say you don’t have to stop sinning after you become a Christian.

D. Where do we draw the line? What other doctrines and practices can be placed into one’s false view of repentance?

V. CONCLUSION.

A. Glorious blessings await the sinner (Ac. 3:19) and the saint (Ac. 8:22) who will truly repent.

B. You will never regret having repented of sin (2 Cor. 7:10). It may be hard to do, but it is worth it!

C. God is waiting for all sinners (non-Christians and erring Christians) to repent – to stop the sin (2 Pet. 3:9).

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