

Ever wondered about repentance?

Sin in all its darkness, is the root cause of humanities predicament. The apostle has rightly said, “*All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). Not until we all understand and become convicted that we have sinned, will we be interested in seeking the saving grace of God.

It is often thought that sin and repentance applies to the unsaved alone, but this is not true. John said, “*sin is lawlessness*” (1 John 3:4). Whether saint or sinner, our lives are made up of three main factors: (1) Attitude, (2) Motive, and (3) Emphasis. Attitude defines our posture or position that then reveals our actions, feelings or mood. What should be our attitude toward repentance? “*Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit; serving the Lord*” (Romans 12:11). Motive determines our emotions that then operate our will and cause us to act. David’s motivation was that, “*...the Lord is great in Zion; and He is high above all the people. Let them praise Thy great and terrible name: for Holy is He*” (Psalm 99:1-3). Our paramount motivation to repent of our sins must be the loving offer of God to forgive us, as well as the loving sacrifice of God the Son on the cross of Calvary. Emphasis is defined as a special consideration or insistence on something; that which is most important to us. It was most important to king David for Jehovah to, “*Teach me, O Lord, the way of Thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end*” (Psalm 119:33). The only correct emphasis for all men and women today is to “*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*” (Matthew 6:33).

Thus it is the case that not one person should ever think that they are above the need to repent. When speaking to a group of men at Athens in the first century, Paul said, “*and the times of this ignorance God overlooked, but now commands ALL MEN EVERYWHERE to repent*” (Acts 17:30). To maintain an attitude, or lack of proper motivation and emphasis toward Biblical repentance will lead a person to becoming as the fig tree (Luke 13:6-9) or the callous hearted Jews (Jeremiah 4:22; 5:21; 6:15).

What Repentance is Not

Some believe that repentance is defined in accordance to the words of Paul as found in 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 which say; “*Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted...*” (NKJV). Paul did not praise the Corinthians because they simply felt sorry for what they had done, because simply being sorry about sin is not repentance.

Paul praised them for having a “*godly*” type of sorrow that led them to make the necessary changes in their lives – thus repentance. Worldly sorrow Paul says, leads to death – the spiritual kind – separation from God (2 Corinthians 7:10; Isaiah 59:1-2). Worldly sorrow means being sorry we got caught, but does not lead us to repair the damage we caused or to stop taking part in the sin. We constantly hear people on the news after being arrested, after being found guilty, say they are sorry for what they did, but are looking for ways to get out of paying the price for their sin. If they were truly sorry, they would insist on paying their debt to society and the person they sinned against.

Repentance is not reforming ones life, or just being a good person. While these are characteristics of godliness, they alone do not constitute repenting of one’s sins. Again, there are a number of things that add up to true Bible repentance. There is no doubt that God demands that we reform our lives and become good people as Paul urged that we, “*present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds....*” (Romans 12:1-2). Reforming ones life and being a good person comes after repentance and not before (see Acts 26:20 and Ezekiel 14:6). Only with the attitude of being willing to reform or transform our minds from worldly thinking to spiritual can we then be well on our way to reaping forgiveness for our sins.

What Repentance Is

Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon defines repentance as: “*to change one’s mind for the better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one’s past sins.*” There can be no doubt then that repentance requires action on our part!

What saith the Scriptures concerning repentance? The Bible says that repentance involves our entire being – the will, the emotions and our intellect. Remember Paul said, “*... for godly sorrow produces repentance*” (2 Corinthians 7:10 NKJV). That means maintaining the proper attitude with a deep sorrow for the sins we have committed, and having an unwavering desire to correct the situation and not to take part in that sin again. King David said, “*...I hate EVERY false way*” (Psalm 119:104); Amos records, “*Hate evil, and love the good*” (Amos 5:15); and Paul warns, “*Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good*” (Romans 12:9). This must be the attitude, motive and emphasis of every penitent sinner, for this is what true godly sorrow is. The prophet Ezekiel exhorts us, “*repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin*” (Ezekiel 18:30).

Repentance is no doubt a challenge to the pride and self-esteem so coveted by the worldly-minded. Yet, the spiritually minded individual will suppress such egotism and seek repentance if he is to reap God’s forgiveness. Whether alien sinner or erring saint, God regards the sin of all accountable people in the same manner. Dirty garments (Revelation 3:4); Dead bodies (Matthew 23:27); as filth and vomit (2 Peter 2:22); Diseased bodies (Isaiah 1:6). Because sin has separated us from our Creator (Isaiah 59:1-2), and sin makes us enemies of God (Colossians 1:21) certain conditions must be met on our part to gain reconciliation. The word ‘*reconcile*’ means a change in relationship. By God’s grace, He has done His part to effect that change, through the giving of His son on the cross (John 3:15-17; Romans 5:10). Our part in realizing that change is through obedience to the Lord’s commands in being saved. Of which repentance is but one step.

The prophets constantly urged the people unto repentance, “*cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby you have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for why will you die, O house of Israel?*” (Ezekiel 18:31; Isaiah 55:7; Joel 2:12). John the Baptizer prepared the way for the gospel and the New Testament church when he preached to the people, “*repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). Jesus commanded His disciples that after He ascended back to the Father, they were to preach repentance and remission of sins in His name among all the nations starting in the city of Jerusalem (Luke 24:47). Jesus also cautioned, “*I tell you, nay: but except you repent, you shall all likewise perish*” (Luke 13:3, 5).

The significance of 2 Corinthians 7:10 defines how ‘*godly sorrow*’ is the point at which the works of repentance are begun. This ‘*godly sorrow*’ attaches itself to the attitude of the individual as he/she demonstrates deep remorse for having offended God and humanity. This attitude then reveals itself through the motivation to “*love thy neighbor as thyself*” (Matthew 22:39) or follow the golden rule, “*whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them*” (Matthew 7:12). Godly sorrow is also a “*conviction,*” - like the people of Pentecost whose hearts were pierced through by the gospel (Acts 2:37-38). The Bible teaches that there can be no repentance without faith or conviction. For Paul said, “*whatsoever is not of faith, is sin*” (Romans 14:23).

Therefore, repentance is a change of mind that results in a **heartly** amending of lifestyle and of past sins. It begins with hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17), then turns to conviction of the heart and godly sorrow in the way one has lived (Acts 2:37). Remorse then motivates us to turn away from sin and embrace righteousness. It moves us to correct every possible sin we have committed and to reform our lives. The Lord says, “*Turn ye even to Me with all your heart*” (Joel 2:12). What is repentance? Remorse, reformation and restitution! Without them all it is no more than the sorrow of the world, which means death.

Examples of Repentance

We have heard the story of Jonah being swallowed by a big fish, but do you recall his mission? God sent him to preach to the people of the city of Ninevah. He was to warn that God's wrath was soon to come for the sins they had committed. When the people heard the words of Jonah, they first believed and then repented (Jonah 3:5-10). The deep abhorrence of their sins caused the Ninevites to amend their ways and turn to serving Jehovah. Notice Jonah 3:10, which says, "God saw their works that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that He said that he would do unto them, and he did it not." Yes, God saw their 'works,' which was the act of their repentance. They had godly sorrow, they reformed their ways, turning to God and living according to His will, and they made restitution by destroying their idols and temples.

In Matthew 21:28-30 Jesus tells of a man who had two sons. The man instructed them to work in his vineyard, to which the first son said no, but later repented and went to work. While the second son said he would, but he lied and did not go. Based upon the requirements of repentance, the first son swallowed his pride, and with deep godly regret for not having obeyed his father immediately corrected the situation. By his works, which was simply obedience to the requirements of God to show true repentance, this son had truly repented.

In Jericho a man named Zacchaeus remarked to Jesus from a sycamore tree that if he had done anything wrongfully toward another, he would restore it four-times (Luke 19:1-8). Zacchaeus showed the proper attitude, motive and emphasis. He was willing to do whatever it took to amend his sins and be right with God.

From each of these illustrations, we learn that repentance must involve a change in our will (humbling of oneself), having a deep abiding regret for our rebellious and sinful life knowing our life must change, and, working diligently to correct all sins that are within our power to do so. It is the determination to surrender oneself to God's will that demonstrates true repentance.

Fruit of Repentance

Bearing in mind that "godly sorrow" produces repentance, not the other way around, our repentance must bear fruit. In other words, it must be visible to others that we have reformed our lives. When the people of Judea came to hear John the Baptizer preach, he told them to "bring forth fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8). Paul describes the type of person who is willing to turn their life around by putting on the new man (Colossians 3:5-10). Jesus said that we could know whether a person is of God or the devil by their fruits (Matthew 7:16-20).

Restitution is a fruit of repentance. There is no way that one can enter sonship or heaven while still possessing stolen property or not having repaired the slander of another, etc. In Exodus 22:1-15 the Law of Moses gave specific rules regarding the restitution of sins committed against another. Even our own civil laws require restitution, so why shouldn't God also require it of us in order to receive forgiveness? What man should expect the mercy of God applied to his account while at the same time refusing to make restitution toward his fellowman? Multitudes have repented in vain having slandered, gossiped or defrauded others, while having it within their power to correct their false statements, or to repay those they have cheated, because they refuse to bring forth the fruit of their repentance.

The inclination of the human will is to remain stubborn and unwilling to admit error. But if allowed to rule, the pride of the heart will surely destroy the soul in the fires of hell (Proverbs 16:18). God has appointed a day in which He will judge the entire world (Acts 17:30-31). The only way to escape hell is to exhibit the qualities of true repentance – faith, godly sorrow, determination to make change and restitution. We should all keep in mind that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents" (Luke 15:10).

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the Scriptures?
Concerning.....

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