**"What is Repentance as Taught in the Bible?"**

**by Duane Permenter**

**Jesus once said that unless we repent we will all perish (Luke 13:3,5). No one wants to perish or suffer eternal condemnation, yet some Christians do not understand this vital theme found within the scriptures. What is repentance? What does the Bible teach relating to repentance?**

**Sometimes, to learn the truth about a particular subject in the scriptures, it is first necessary to discuss what people believe and then compare it with the inspired text. Several ideas about repentance propagated are not found within God’s Word. Before we look at the positive side (what the Bible teaches) we are going to discuss what the Scriptures do not teach, that is, the negative.**

**For instance, some people call conviction repentance. Conviction of sin is imperative to first-century Christianity. Those in the New Testament who repented were first convicted of their sin, yet this was not repentance. A person may have full understanding that what he or she may have done is wrong and still never reach the point of repentance.**

**Conviction is the awareness or realization of sin. Notice what Jesus says the Holy Spirit would do when he came and inspired the apostles: "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). James later depicted God’s Word as a mirror reflecting our true image. James commanded each of us to look into this mirror and see our true likeness. God’s Word can cause us to understand our ruined state if we are willing to listen and apply it.**

**Our Lord always met the needs of the people with whom He was dealing. In fact, He continues to meet the needs of each lonely heart. Peter says that God has supplied all we need for life and godliness through His written Word (2 Peter 1:3,4). The gospel of Jesus Christ can and will convict the sinner of his lost state, but is this what the Bible calls repentance?**

**For illustration, Peter and the other apostles preached a powerful sermon in Acts 2 to the Jews. Evidently, Peter convicted these men of their sin because, after the accusation of betraying and murdering the Son of God, they asked the question, "What should we do?" Peter said, "...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). Conviction always precedes repentance, but an awareness of sin is not necessarily evidence of repentance. While giving us a knowledge of what we are is a part of our spiritual need, this is not repentance.**

**Others claim that being scared of eternal torment or being afraid of God’s wrath is repentance. Though a godly fear is important, simply being afraid is not what the Lord wants. We should understand that there is a great difference between being frightened of the Almighty and reverencing His omnipotent name.**

**The preacher writes in Ecclesiastes 12:13, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep his commandments, for this is man’s all." The same scribe records in another place, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...." We need to have a wholesome fear of God’s divine power. We must recognize that God expects us to obey His Word. When we rise to such a height or measure of human maturity that we no longer venerate Jehovah and His Word, then we are in a very bad situation.**

**Our Lord will punish the wicked, and He will reward the righteous. We must remember that though our Father is full of tender mercy, He will punish those who disobey at the end of time. Living in respect for His will and power is different than simply being afraid or scared in time of tragedy. Often when a person promises to obey God under fire, he will forget those promises when difficulties have ended.**

**We need a sincere reverence for His will under every walk of life in the good and bad times alike. Fear, or reverence, is a part of the Christian's life, but just because a person acknowledges fear is no sign he has repented.**

**Someone else says, "Look at the sorrow exemplified in that person's life. Surely this is proof of repentance." The Bible speaks of two kinds of sorrow. Listen to Paul in 2 Corinthians 7:8-10: "For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. 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 produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted, but the sorrow of the world produces death."**

**Paul plainly says that godly sorrow leads to repentance. If godly sorrow leads to repentance, then sorrow cannot be repentance. Notice that the writer says worldly sorrow leads to death. This sorrow is not based on a commitment to be right with God. For instance, a man may be sorry that his embezzling scheme has been found out because now he has a prison sentence hanging over his head. This is not godly sorrow. While godly sorrow is not repentance by itself, it will lead one to the repentance that is necessary for salvation.**

**Still others claim that reformation is proof positive that repentance has occurred. Let us think about this for just a moment. A person may come to realize that his drinking is stealing away everything that is important to his life. He might even decide to reform his life because alcohol is destroying all that is valuable to him. Yes, it is true that if a man repents of alcoholism, he quits drinking. If a man repents of stealing, he will steal no more (as the Bible teaches). Nevertheless, this is not necessarily evidence that he has repented. One may reform his life without ever repenting toward God for his sin.**

**John the Baptist once told the Pharisees, "Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance...." If a man steals another person’s wife and repents, he will end the adulterous situation. The man who repents of sin will quit committing the sin. Reformation of life always follows a sinner's repentance, but reformation alone is not repentance.**

**What Is Repentance?**

**One of the best ways to illustrate this Bible principle is to read from a parable of Jesus. Notice Matthew 21:28-30, "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’ He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go." The first son said he would not go and work. His will was not his father’s will, so he refused his father’s request. However, the Bible says he changed his mind; that is, he changed his will. Repentance is a change of will. I will serve God and no longer my own will. I will turn about face and live my life in reverence to Jehovah.**

**When God’s Word tells me about my sin, this causes me to be sorry because I fear His eternal wrath and power. I am sorry that I wronged Him and that my sin caused His Son Jesus Christ to die on Calvary. This godly sorrow will lead me to repentance and eternal salvation. This repentance will cause me to say, "God is the potter. I am the clay. I will follow the example of Jesus and pray not my will, but yours be done."**

**Repentance is absolutely necessary if I am to be saved. Will repentance be enough to save me in the end? No! Peter told the people in Acts 2 that both repentance and baptism were mandatory. Although Saul of Tarsus had displayed evidence of repentance for three days by continual fasting and prayer, Ananias commanded him to be baptized in order to wash away his sins. Repentance alone was not enough in the days of the apostles, and it is not enough for sinners today.**

**What about the erring Christian? Peter told Simon in Acts 8 that repentance and prayer were in order. Listen to the apostle in 1 John 1:9 concerning Christians who sin: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Repentance, confession, and prayer are all necessary to restore the child of God.**

**When a person repents of sins, preceding this will be conviction, reverence, and godly sorrow. The result of repentance is that one will reform his life. The pertinent question for all to consider today is: "Have I repented as the Bible commands?" Judgment is coming and each of us will give an account of the sins of which we have not repented. King Jesus commands alien sinner and Christian alike to repent or forever perish from the presence of Almighty God.**