
REPENTANCE

The message of the Bible stated very simply is no repentance, no salvation. “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). Only as one repents can he move from darkness to light. He turns from his sin seeing it is the cause of his condemnation. The things he once loved he now hates and hangs his head in shame and sorrow for having indulged in them. Renouncing his own nature, he thus becomes eligible to partake of the divine nature.

John the Baptist announced that the kingdom of heaven was at hand and at the same time called on people to repent. Unless he repents he cannot enter the kingdom. He required that men bring forth fruits meet for repentance. (See Matthew 3:8.) Genuine repentance will be evident to our fellowmen.

Jesus preached repentance. “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17).

The apostles preached repentance. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached a message that brought conviction to many. Finally they cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:37, 38).

God has a high premium on genuine repentance. Israel was delivered from captivity as soon as they turned to Him in repentance. A deliverer was then sent.

We conclude that repentance is the initial step to receive the mercy and grace of God.

Unless an individual repents of and confesses his sins, thus recognizing his need before God, he will not receive forgiveness of sin.

The devil is continually offering a counterfeit to man to deprive him of a real experience. The repentance the devil advocates is much easier to the flesh. Beware of a false sense of security. The devil’s way does not produce the desired results. What are some of the false concepts of repentance?

FALSE CONCEPTS OF REPENTANCE

Repentance—a mere change of mind. This is false because a thief who stops stealing because he fears being caught has not repented. Sometimes individuals cease to indulge in various lusts of the flesh due to lack of facilities; this is not necessarily repentance.

Repentance is reformation. This is the devil’s subtle philosophy that turning to good deeds will compensate for past sin. Some individuals ‘settle down’ but fail to ‘settle up’ with God. Sin in God’s record is sin until it has been removed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Confession of sin is repentance. While confession is part of the ‘genuine,’ it is quite possible to confess sin and never repent of it. The Bible gives a number of examples of those who employed this philosophy. A dread of punishment provoked many of these confessions. But beneath the surface was a determination to still go their own way.

During the plagues in Egypt, Pharaoh said, "I have sinned" (Exodus 9:27). However, when the plague was lifted, he hardened his heart and refused to let the children of Israel go.

Balaam said, "I have sinned" (Numbers 22:34), but he went on in spite of the drawn sword of the angel, enticed by the disastrous gleam of Balak's gold.

Achan said, "I have sinned" (Joshua 7:20), like some criminal on the scaffold who confesses only when the consequences of his iniquity stare him horribly in the face.

Saul said, "I have sinned" (1 Samuel 15:30), but only to return to his demoniac envy. He was ready to admit sin but was still determined to save face before the people.

Judas said, "I have sinned" (Matthew 27:4), but in him it was only despair and remorse as he flung the bribe money down in the temple.

The bitter end of these men displays the final end of a mere confession without repentance. It proves the fallacy of periodic confession of sin without a genuine change of life.

TRUE REPENTANCE

The essential elements of true repentance may be stated in four words: conviction, contrition, confession, and restitution. In simpler words, it includes a consciousness of guilt, a godly sorrow for sin, a desire to forsake sin, a confession of sin, and a desire to make restitution for sin.

What brings conviction of sin? God's Spirit strives with man and causes him to understand God's claim and demand on his life. He sees God and His law as perfect, thus revealing the awfulness of sin. His intellect must be enlightened and this is accomplished by exposure to the Word. Nineveh came under conviction by the preaching of Jonah. On Pentecost it was the preaching of the Word that brought men under conviction.

The first step in repentance is a conviction of having done wrong. God, by the Word, the Holy Spirit, and the conscience is pointing His finger at the sinner and saying, "You have sinned, and except you repent, you shall die eternally." This is an act of love and kindness.

The sinner has to be dealt with, too. Not only must he repent for what he has done, but also for whom he is—a sinner by nature. He must sense the need for a new nature and mind. He must be cleansed in heart and mind by the blood of Jesus from the defilement of the sinful nature. Romans 7:24, 25 states that it is only through the Lord Jesus Christ that man can be delivered from the body of sin.

Contrition or godly sorrow follows a yielding to conviction of sin. This is not sorrow over the dilemma we are in, but penitence for sin. "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (2 Corinthians 7:10). No man has ever truly repented of any sin without a deep feeling of sorrow because of it. He sees he has insulted the holy God, has shunned the grace of God, and is worthy of punishment according to the righteousness of God. When one is truly sorry toward God for his sins, he is willing to meet whatever conditions God demands. He is now ready to confess without any attempt to save face as did King Saul.

Confession of sin to God is necessary because the Bible demands it. "God . . . now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Unless we are willing to confess our sins to God, we are not penitent. Then comes the responsibility to confess the sin to anyone involved or against whom we have

sinned. If it has hindered or marred the testimony and purity of the church, it needs to be confessed publicly to the church.

The step following true repentance and confession is a desire to make restitution wherever possible. The thief desires and makes every effort to restore the money he has stolen. The individual who has lied to or misinformed someone will correct the matter with those involved.

FAITH AND REPENTANCE

There must be a balance between these two. We must take God at His word. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The devil will attempt to frustrate the penitent by tempting him to doubt God and question whether his sins are forgiven. Simple faith and true repentance bring a blessed release from the load of sin. Paul preached “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). In Christ we find forgiveness from past sins and deliverance from the power of sin.

REPENTANCE IN ACTION

The account of the prodigal son in Luke 15 gives a vivid illustration of the fruits of repentance. The young man demanded his portion of the inheritance from his father. Then he took a trip into a far country, the meanwhile indulging in all sorts of sins. When the money was gone, the friends also forsook him. He took a job herding swine and would have been glad to fill himself with the same husks the swine were eating, but no one gave him any.

The turning point: “And when he came to himself” (Luke 15:17) was the time he began facing the facts. Finally he saw his need. Immediately he saw the provision: “How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!” (Luke 15:17). He determined to take advantage of the provision: “I will arise and go to my father” (Luke 15:18).

He immediately forsook his present environment. This is one of the marks of true repentance—forsaking sin. True repentance for sin brings victory over sin. He was also ready to confess, “I have sinned.” Failure to recognize sin as sin and deal with it as such makes victory impossible.

A proper concept of man’s condition and need before God makes repentance a state of heart, rather than just an act. Man will not become presumptuous toward a holy God as he recognizes his unworthiness before Him. The son said, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son” (Luke 15:18, 19). This unmistakably displays a broken spirit. He went one step further: “make me as one of thy hired servants” (verse 19). He was ready to be a servant instead of being served. No face-saving, no “reformation only,” no shifting of the blame, but a recognizing of the sinner and the sin.

Repentance is not genuine when individuals profess to have repented but there remains a spirit of rebellion, with self-esteem and pride evident.

The persons who have repented are ready to speak and to teach against the very sin that they were once guilty of. Parents who excuse their children and say, “We must remember the things we did when we were young,” have not repented. Those who have repented do not speak of their past sins lightly or boastfully under any circumstances.

GOD’S RESPONSE TO TRUE REPENTANCE

“And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). This father is a type of God as he watches and waits for his son. God desires that the whole human race would come to him in repentance, “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). God is eager to forgive our sins and to cleanse our hearts and minds from all unrighteousness. He is able to do this because Christ has already borne our iniquities in His own body upon the cross. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

Were it not for the love of God, we should have to die in our sins. But praise God, there is a way!

Dear Reader, the choice is yours. Forgiveness of sin and a new heart are only for those who want them. The alternative is clear: “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). Search your heart; is the evidence of true repentance present? If you are condoning sin in your life, Satan has you trusting in a counterfeit. Measure your experience with the Word.

This moment God is waiting, just as was the father of the prodigal, for all to come to Him in true penitence. As you meet His terms, all the promises of the Bible become your own. Will you come to Him now? “The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” (Romans 2:4).