

Return to the Lord

Built in to the message of the prophets was the appeal to repent. These men were sent by God to expose sin and urge the guilty to repent. Often the appeal was framed as a challenge to return to the Lord (Isaiah 6:10; Jeremiah 3:1; Malachi 3:7). For instance, Joel's appeal to Judah was for the people to repent of their sins. "So rend your heart," and "return to the Lord your God" (Joel 2:13). Through the distribution of His judgments (locusts, drought, desolation), God intended to admonish His people to come out of their sin and back to Him. It was His loving purpose to prompt a change in their direction. The essential definition of repentance has not changed through the dispensations. We can, therefore, use Joel's statement as the basis for our understanding of returning to the Lord. And this study can find application for those who have been baptized but have left their God.

Repentance is a change in direction. The simple word "turn" shows that to be so. Those guilty of sin (before or after baptism) need to turn; a change of direction is needed. If you've been letting the world influence your thinking, your speech, your conduct, your dress or attitude, you need to change your direction. If you've abandoned the assembly, harbored ill-will in your heart, accepted false teaching, helped false teaching advance, participated in party strife or refused to grow, God seeks a change in your direction. Repentance is a change in your direction, turning from your sin to the Lord (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

Repentance occurs in the heart. Observe in verse 12 of Joel 2, "with all your heart." Everything we do before God ought to be done with a whole heart. Repentance, to be complete and genuine, must come from a whole heart: a heart of reverence for God, love for God; a heart influenced by the cross of Christ. Repentance should be the product of a heart of mature responsibility toward everything that is holy and right. The conviction of sin from the Word should be let in, so that repentance finds its' true and good expression.

Repentance is not just a ritual. "So rend your heart, and not your garments..." It was customary among the Jews to express their emotions in very public, visible ways. To this day in middle eastern cultures, when a family member dies, there may be public weeping and wailing; throwing dust in the air; beating the breast and the rendering of garments. The problem to be noted here is, the emotion must not be ritualized and confused with true repentance. The fact that someone may cry in public or come down an aisle doesn't assure wholehearted repentance. Repentance is a personal decision to leave sin behind and come to God. It is a decision of heart, productive of good fruit. It may be accompanied by some open expression, but the essence of the matter lies in the heart and the results in life.

Repentance is made possible by a gracious God. "Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love..." If you are alive to hear the Word, be convicted and repent, thank God that you have such a blessed opportunity. Thank Him for the precious blood of Christ. "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." If you are alive today, you can repent. Thank God for the time He has given you to return to Him, but don't presume upon His grace and providence. "He relents from doing harm," but the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. Repent while there is time.

If you are reading this as one convicted of your sin, now is the time to repent. If you just plan to repent someday, that isn't good enough. Ask God to relent, turn from your sin and enjoy peace with Him through the Lord Jesus Christ.

- by Warren E. Berkeley

Men

One of the greatest needs is men! Men who are bigger than trifles; men with the breadth of intellect and depth of character; men who will not stoop to cheat or be unfair; men who will not stand imperiously on their rights, but who in magnanimity of soul cast away personal advantage for the good of many; men who will not lie, and defame, and steal to increase their own personal fame or fortune; men who would rather stand with the right in the end than to have their own way; men who love the truth and are willing to die for it rather than to compromise with falsehood; men who act upon principle in all their dealings with their fellow men rather than personal feelings

whether of bias or prejudice; men with clean hearts and pure motives; men who feel neither envy nor jealousy when one of superior endowments and greater ability surpasses what they have been able to achieve; men who are not too big to be satisfied to fill the place in the world for which they were created and fitted by the benign creator who made every man for a definite place in His infinite universe of time and space and sense.

- by **A. Hugh Clark**

Be Careful What You 'Like'

Facebook, of course, is the world's most popular social networking website. One of the features of Facebook is the ability to 'like' something that has been posted there by another user. Typically, to 'like' something means that you find it funny, or agree with what is being said. It is a way of indicating that you appreciate it in some way . . . that you are a fan of it . . . that you just 'like' it.

Unfortunately, there are frequent examples of Christians 'liking' things that should actually repulse them. For example:

- Someone posts an inappropriate picture of them self in immodest clothing – yet several Facebook 'friends' will indicate that they 'like' this.
- Another discusses some recent immoral behavior – effectively boasting about the sinful thing that has been done – and his Facebook buddies nod their approval with a thoughtless 'like'.
- Often people will reference some risqué movie, an ungodly television show, or a worldly concert or performance. They suggest that they really enjoyed it and recommend it to others – and many are quick to 'like' this, too.

In all of these things and more, we need to be reminded that God's Word says we should "not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them," and warns us that "it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them" (Ephesians 5:11,12). Surely, this is the polar opposite of 'liking' such things.

And, one more thing to consider – increasingly we are hearing of certain brethren who are posting questionable and erroneous doctrinal statements on their Facebook pages. Or, they may 'link' to some article or comments by a religious false teacher. They endorse this, and their 'friends' 'like' it as well. But the Scriptures teach us that we should not "bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 John 10,11)

Be careful about your influence and example before you click 'like' on Facebook. Think!

- by **Greg Gwin**