

Repentance

Repentance plays a major role in the salvation of the soul. Numerous passages speak of the absolute necessity of a sinner repenting in order to get back into a right relationship with God. Without repentance, there can be no forgiveness of sins. This is so because we serve a God Who is righteous and cannot tolerate sin. John once wrote, *"This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all"* (1 John 1:5).

What Is Repentance?

Since repentance is so vital to our relationship with God, let us make sure we know what it is. Someone says, *"To repent means to turn our life around."* Not exactly. It is true that genuine repentance will result in lives being changed or turned around, but the turning is not repentance, it is reformation. Certain sinful behavior can be stopped without true repentance taking place. A man who is thrown into prison might have a change of lifestyle and quit doing whatever it is that landed him in prison, but that does not mean he has repented. It may be nothing more than a desire not to go to prison again.

So what is repentance? Thayer says that repentance means *"to change one's mind"* (Thayer's Greek Lexicon). Vine has the following: *"to perceive afterward" (meta, "after," implying "change," noeo, "to perceive"; nous, "the mind, the seat of moral reflection"), in contrast to pronoeo, "to perceive beforehand," hence signifies "to change one's mind or purpose," always, in the NT, involving a change for the better"* (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words). And Strong says, *"to think differently or afterward, i.e. reconsider"* (Strong's Greek-Hebrew Dictionary).

True repentance has to do with having a change of heart. Jesus exemplified this in his illustration of the disobedient son: "What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went." (Matthew 21:28-29 (ESV)). Notice that the repentance and the *"going"* were two different actions. Repentance was the son's change of mind. He considered the situation and started to think differently about what his father instructed him to do. Once he changed his mind, he went.

The distinction between repentance and reformation is seen in the words of John the Baptist in Matthew 3:8 when He told the Pharisees and Sadducees to not only repent (have a change of mind) but to bring forth fruit meet for repentance (change of action).

Why is this distinction important to understand? It is important because the condition of a man's heart is important. People who are in sin will not truly turn to the Lord until they have experienced genuine repentance, that is, a true change of heart. Members of the church, who are wishy-washy in their service to God, will not change for good until they start thinking differently about God and sin. Unbelievers, who come to Christ in faith and obedience, only remain faithful if they have truly come to perceive sin as deplorable and God as the Supreme Being who deserves to be obeyed in everything. When that kind of repentance takes place, the life of the person will truly be changed; not temporarily, but permanently, unless, of course, he changes his mind again and goes back to a carnal kind of thinking.

I constantly see two kinds of people responding to the invitation of Christ. First, the one who comes forward to be baptized or ask the prayers of the church because of an emotional surge of some kind. This person usually ends up back in the world, often after just a short period. This is a person who probably has not had a true change of heart. Then, I see people whose lives are truly transformed. They are almost unrecognizable because the old man has been put away, and they have become new creatures in Christ. They have repented. They have made up their minds that they will leave sin behind and serve God with all their hearts.

Have you truly repented? If there is sin in your life, you need to change; but, if that change is to last, you must have a genuine change of mind toward sin. As Peter once said, *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord"* Acts 3:19).

- by Don Wright

Wide Open

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians with the news that he intended to visit them. However, his visit would be delayed because he was pursuing opportunities in Ephesus. He said: *"I shall come to you after I go through Macedonia . . . and perhaps I shall stay with you, or even spend the winter . . . if the Lord permits. But I shall remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries"* (1 Corinthians 16:5-9).

Notice, especially, that Paul perceived great prospects in Ephesus. He could see a tremendous potential for "effective service." Did he mean that everyone in that city was eagerly receiving the gospel message? Was everyone anxious to hear the truths that Paul was preaching? Could it be that the whole city might be converted to Christ?

The answers to these questions – **NO!** In fact, during this visit to Ephesus a riot broke out in opposition to what Paul was preaching. Demetrius, a silversmith who made shrines to the idol goddess Diana, led a great uprising. *"The whole city was filled with confusion,"* and some of the disciples were taken captive. Paul's own personal safety was at risk (Acts 19:23ff).

When Paul wrote about that *"wide door for effective service,"* he also knew that *"there are many adversaries."* He was not blind to the dangers that surrounded him, but he was still excited about the good that could be accomplished.

The lesson for us is this: the reality of opposition does not diminish the potential for good and effective work. There never has been, and never will be, a time when God's truth and His people are unopposed. Even in adversity we need to be looking for 'open doors' for proclaiming the Word. Don't wait for the perfect situation. Don't hesitate because of 'adversaries'. There is much to do and doors of opportunity are 'wide open' for the gospel. Think!

- by Greg Gwin