

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

'Beholding the Evil and the Good'

"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." (Proverbs 15:3)

For a long time we have used this verse and others in the Bible to emphasize that no evil deed is missed by God. He sees. He Knows. Do not think that you can act in violation of His law without being observed and noted. *"All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do"* (Hebrews 4: 13).

But this verse from Proverbs states another truth that we often ignore. It promises that God is watching what we do that is good, too. He perceives every good deed, every noble effort, and each act of faithful service. Do we believe it? Apparently not. Instead, we often feel compelled to boast of everything we do. We have to tell others, and explain all of the details. We're tempted to brag about our level of knowledge or special skills.

Jesus dealt with this problem in His famous Sermon on the Mount. He warned that if we do what we do "to be seen of men" then we "have our reward", and we can expect "no reward from your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 6:1-8).

The attitude that we need is this: *"When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do"* (Luke 17:10).

So, Christian, don't feel that you need to point out all of your good deeds. God knows and will reward you. *"We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad"*(2 Corinthians 5:10).

- by Greg Gwin