

## ***Understanding Repentance***

Repentance is one of those religious words and ideas that not everyone understands. Some who do understand it suggest it is the hardest of the Lord's commands. This grabs our interest and makes us want to know what the Bible says about repentance.

It is an absolute necessity. Peter wrote that the Lord "is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Paul preached that God "commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He has ordained" (Acts 17:30-31). It is a requirement for salvation.

It comes from godly sorrow. In 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 Paul says concerning a church's sin of tolerating evil, "Now I rejoice, not you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner ... for godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death." Repentance is not remorse or sorrow but godly sorrow leads to it.

It shows itself in good works. John warned those who came to his baptism that they had to "Bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Matthew 3:8). There is something to do for salvation. Some have suggested that repentance is this action of reformation. But this passage shows they are not the same, Repentance leads to reformation. The works are not the repentance. They are its result.

One of the Lord's parables helps. "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. Which of the two did the will of his father?" (Matthew 21:28-31) What happened with the first son? He changed his mind, and did what his father asked him to do. And that is what repentance is.

It is defined by these verses. Repentance is a change of mind, that comes from godly sorrow, and shows itself in good works. If this change of mind does not come from godly sorrow for our sins then it is not Bible repentance. If it does not show itself in doing the works of God then it is not Bible repentance.

Baptism joins with repentance when faith obeys the gospel. Acts 2 says men were to "know assuredly" that the crucified Jesus was "both Lord and Christ" (36-37). Those who were "cut to the heart" asked "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (37) Peter answered, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins" (38). In faith (know assuredly) their godly sorrow (cut to the heart) led them to repentance that showed itself in good works (baptized),

Why do some say it is hard to do? It may be because repentance has to do with the heart rather than our actions. Outward obedience is rather simple and easily accomplished, but to change the mind is a question of our will at its deepest point. Belief is a response of the mind to the Bible's testimony of witnesses, but to change the mind is about what we are willing to do with this acceptance of truth. Do we want to change?

The result is heavenly joy. At the end of the Lord's parable of the lost coin the woman "When she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost.' Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:9-10). All who repent give joy, not just to themselves and those here with them, but there is joy in heaven among the angels when the wanderer is safely with God.

***- by Robert Hines***

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## ***How Happy are you?***

"Rejoice in the lord always: and again I say rejoice." (Phil. 4:4)

Look at all of the blessing that Christians have. The material blessings are available for everyone and they are without number. We live in a country that is well blessed with material things, freedom, beauty of all kinds - and how long could the list be! Even the air that we breathe, the water that we drink, and the ground that we walk upon are blessing from God. In addition to

these things Christians have the forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God and fellow Christians, and the hope of an eternity in the presence of God. God has written to us about the assurance of His love, the blessedness of His hope, and the wonders of salvation. We can, by adhering to His word, bask in the sunshine of His love.

When we look around us and observe fellow Christians, what do we see and hear? There is murmuring and complaining. There is worry about mundane things and things that we cannot do anything about, and we complain about everything in sight.

We must learn to exercise our minds, and learn to separate the good from the evil. God says "rejoice" and we need to be learning how.

**- by Tom Wheeler**

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## ***Membership in a Local Congregation***

Questions about membership in a local congregation often arise. Questions like: When? How? Why? We believe that many such questions can be answered by studying the case of Saul (Paul) when he returned to Jerusalem following his conversion. . .

"And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus..." (Acts 9:26-29).

Notice the things we learn from this text:

1) The action was immediate. There was no long delay on Saul's part before seeking to identify with God's people in Jerusalem. It seems obvious that Saul knew the benefit of close association with faithful brethren. He had experienced it in Damascus just before coming to Jerusalem. Oftentimes folks today wait months, even years, before identifying with a local congregation. Clearly, local church membership is part of God's plan. We miss out on something important when we fail to follow Saul's example of immediately seeking to join ourselves with a faithful church.

2) It was Saul who took the initiative in this matter. The KJV says "he assayed to join himself to the disciples." Other versions say "he tried to" or "he was trying to." The point is, he made the effort. He did not wait for others to approach him. It was his responsibility to accomplish this, and he did not neglect to do so.

3) The church put him to the test. The Christians in Jerusalem needed to know of Saul's conversion and his faithfulness. Evidence was presented to them to verify that Saul was a faithful Christian. They were not obligated to receive him into their fellowship until they were convinced of his proper standing before God. And, too, observe that Saul was not "put of" or turned away by their desire to know these things about his former life.

4) As soon as he was a part of that congregation, he got actively involved in the work that was being done.

Surely we can all learn some important lessons from this text about membership in a local church. Are you a member of a faithful congregation? Are you active and working? If not, why not?

**- by Greg Gwin**