

Repentance, Its Meaning, and Necessity

*“I tell you no; but unless you **repent** you will all likewise perish,”* Luke 13:5. *“Truly these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to **repent**,”* Acts 17:30. *“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**,”* 2 Peter 3:9.

The preceding are but a few among many scriptures which stress the necessity of repentance. As Luke 13:5 indicates, it is truly a case of *“repent”* or *“perish!”* But what is repentance? What does it involve. What are some of the motivating factors which prompt one to repent?

“Repentance,” the noun, is translated from *metanoia* (Greek) which means “to perceive afterward” (**Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words**, by Vine). Looking more closely, we observe that *“repentance,”* the word, is a combination of *meta* (Greek), meaning “after, implying change,” and *noeo* (Greek), meaning “to perceive.” Vine further states that in the New Testament it “has reference to repentance from sin, and this change of mind involves both a turning from sin and a turning to God.” Repentance, in military language, denotes an “about face;” it has to do with turning from that which is wrong and turning to that which is right, a turning from Satan and a turning to God. It begins in the mind, and it is reflected in one’s actions.

Motivating Factors Leading to Repentance

1. It is prompted by “godly sorrow.” Note 2 Cor. 7:9-10: *“Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For **godly sorrow produces repentance** leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”* Herein you will note two kinds of “sorrow,” one being *“the sorrow of the world”* which produces “death,” and the other being “godly sorrow” which leads *“to salvation.”* No doubt at this very moment there are many who are serving time in prison, having been convicted of bank robbery, and they are sorry, but some of them are looking forward to being released, whereupon they plan to commit the “perfect crime” — that of robbing a bank, but **not** getting caught! This is simply *“the sorrow of the world”* which *“produces death.”* Peter and Judas serve as biblical examples which illustrate the difference between “godly sorrow” and *“the sorrow of the world.”* Prior to the crucifixion of Jesus, Peter found himself in the wrong company. Jesus had been apprehended and led away to be tried and crucified. And Peter *“sat outside in the courtyard,”* Matt. 26:60, primarily among the enemies of Jesus. When accused of having been *“with Jesus of Galilee,”* Peter lied, saying, *“I do not know what you are saying.”* Finally, at the third accusation, Peter even *“began to curse and swear, saying, I do not know the man.”* Then the rooster crowed, and Peter remembered the words of Jesus who had said to him, *“Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.”* It was then that Peter *“went out and wept bitterly,”* Matt. 26:69-75. Yes, Peter experienced “sorrow,” and based upon his subsequent life, it is evident that he experienced “godly sorrow!” He had sinned against Jesus whom, notwithstanding his latest actions, he loved dearly. Judas, on the other hand, betrayed Jesus for *“thirty pieces of silver,”* Matt. 26:14-16. However, After Jesus had been falsely accused and unjustly sentenced to die by crucifixion, Judas was *“remorseful,”* which means he was filled with

“sorrow.” But instead of truly repenting he “went and hanged himself,” Matt. 27:1-4. Peter reflects “godly sorrow;” Judas reflects “the sorrow of the world.” Yes, apart from “godly sorrow,” there is no true repentance!

2. “The goodness of God!” “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance,” Rom. 2:4? Yes, as the song says, “God is so good!” He created us in His “own image,” Gen. 1:27. It is in Him that “we live and move and have our being,” Acts 17:28. From God comes “every good gift and every perfect gift,” Jas. 1:17. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life,” John 3:16. God continues to give “us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness,” Acts 14:17. How then can a sober-minded person reflect upon “the goodness of God,” and all that that expression implies, and not be filled with “godly sorrow” as he reflects upon that fact that he has sinned, Rom. 3:23, and that every sin one commits is an insult to the infinite holiness of God!!

3. The longsuffering of God. “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,” 2 Peter 3:9. “The longsuffering of God” could be categorized as being a manifestation of “the goodness of God.” However, the apostle Peter clearly depicted a connection between “the longsuffering of God” and “repentance.” When we, on the one hand, ponder “the goodness of God,” and then, on the other hand, give consideration to His “longsuffering,” we should be moved to repentance! Notwithstanding the exceeding sinfulness of sin (**our** own sins!) and the grief which God experiences because of our sins, we should be amazed that God has been so patient with us. However, we should realize that, as it was in the days of Noah, God’s spirit will “not strive with man forever..,” Gen. 6:3. Jesus is coming, and He will do so “as a thief in the night,” I Thess. 5:2. For that matter, death is never further away than one heart beat! It is foolish to delay repentance on the assumption that “I have plenty of time yet!”

4. Judgment day is coming! “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad,” 2 Cor. 5:10. It is interesting to note the connection between verses 30 and 31 of Acts 17. Verse 30 informs us that God “now commands all men everywhere to repent.” Verse 31 cites a great motivating factor leading one to repent; it being “**because** He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness...” Succinctly stated, verse 30 commands us to repent; verse 31 tell us to repent “because” we are going to be judged!

5. The desire to go to heaven! There is a heaven to gain, Matt. 5:12, and there is a hell to shun, Matt. 10:28! Every accountable person has a choice of agonizing eternally in that horrible place where the “worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched,” Mark 9:46,48, or dwelling forever in that glorious abode where “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes,” where there shall “be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying,” where there will be “no more pain,” Rev. 21:4, that place where God is, along with the redeemed of all ages, where one can forever eat of the tree of life and drink of the water of life, Rev. 22:1-2. In view of these alternatives, every one should choose heaven, and genuine **repentance** is one of the requirements for being saved.

True Repentance is Difficult!

It is not difficult to understand. but it is difficult to make the 180 degree change in our lives which repentance, by its very nature, demands. “Godly sorrow” which produces repentance,

2 Cor. 7:10, is rooted in love; it is driven by faith, and it expresses itself outwardly by one bearing “*fruits worthy of repentance*,” Matt. 3:8; Acts 26:20. When possible, it even involves restitution of things unlawfully obtained, Luke 19:8.

Conclusion:

It is only when we understand the nature of true repentance that we can begin to comprehend the sinfulness of sin. It is a great blessing to be afforded the opportunity to repent! And, properly understood, a refusal to repent of sin reflects the very essence of hard heartedness and, yes, stupidity! Friend, if there is sin in your life, we urge you to “*repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance*,” Acts 26:20. Do it today. Tomorrow may be too late!

**** —Bobby Witherington