

Repentance: The Most Difficult Command

The word “repent” in its various forms occurs more than 100 times in the Bible. This shows the great importance of repentance. Nearly every church requires repentance from sin of those who wish to be members. However, repentance is a greatly misunderstood command of God. It is also a very difficult command. Some have said it is the most difficult command in all the Bible.

What Is Repentance?

Sometimes the best way to learn the meaning of a word is first to look at what it is not before looking at what it is. Many people think repentance is just being sorry for one’s sins. This is not what repentance is! The apostle Paul wrote: *“For godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, a repentance which bringeth no regret: but the sorrow of the world worketh death”* (2 Corinthians 7:10). If one is sorry for the sins he has committed, it will cause him to repent of them. On Pentecost Day, the Jews who heard Peter preach Christ *“pricked in their heart.”* This shows they were very sorry for their sin of crucifying Jesus, but their sorrow for sin was not repentance. Peter still had to tell them to *“Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins”* (Acts 2:37-38).

If repentance is not being sorry for one’s sins, then what is repentance? According to all the teaching of the Bible, repentance is a change of one’s mind toward sin. It is produced by godly sorrow for one’s sins. The result of this change of mind toward sin will be a change of life. A good example of what is involved in repentance is a parable that Jesus told: *“But what think ye? A man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in the vineyard. And he answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented himself, and went”* (Matthew 21:28-29). The son disobeyed his father. When he regretted (was sorry) for his disobedience, he changed his mind about his decision. He then did what his father had asked him to do.

Repentance involves restitution. “Restitution” means that we will make right the things we have done wrong in so far as possible. If one has murdered another person, he can not restore that person back to life. He can, however, help the widow and children of the man he has killed. If one has stolen money from another person, when he repents, he must return the money he has stolen. John the Baptist told the Pharisees and Sadducees: *“Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance”* (Matthew 3:8).

Who Should Repent?

Those who are not Christians must repent of their sins in order to be saved. Jesus commanded *“that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem”* (Luke 24:47). Paul told the people of Athens that God *“commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent”* (Acts 17:30). On

Pentecost Day, when the Jews who heard the Gospel had cried out *“What shall we do?”* Peter told them *“Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins”* (Acts 2:37-38).

Christians who have sinned also need to repent. When Philip preached in Samaria, Simon, who had been a sorcerer, became a Christian. When he saw the apostles giving the gifts of the Holy Spirit by laying their hands on the Christians, he wanted to buy this power. *“But Peter said unto him, Thy silver perish with thee, because thou hast thought to obtain the gift of God with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray the Lord, if perhaps the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee.”* (Acts 8:20-22).

Why Should One Repent?

We have already learned that godly sorrow produces repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). In Jesus’ parable of the two sons, we learned that the son who refused to obey his father regretted his decision. Therefore, he changed his mind and did his father’s will. His regret (godly sorrow for his disobedience) caused him to repent and obey his father’s command (Matthew 21:28-29). One will repent if he is sorry for his sins.

One will also repent of his sins when he understands God’s goodness toward him. Paul asked, *“Or despisest thou the*

riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:4). God loves us and sent His only begotten Son to die for our sins (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10; Romans 5:6-8). God's goodness should make us want to repent of our sins against Him.

One will also repent of his sins because the Day of Judgment is coming. Paul told the idolaters in Athens: *"The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked; but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent: inasmuch as he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."* (Acts 17:30-31). Christ is now ruling from the right hand of God in Heaven, but one day He will come again to raise the dead and judge the whole world (Acts 1:9-11; John 5:28-29). Everyone who is living and who has ever lived will be judged (Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10). We must repent of our sins so that we will not be condemned at the Judgment!

When Should One Repent?

The Jews on Pentecost repented the same day they heard the Gospel. They were then baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:37-38, 41). Since one can not be saved without repentance, then one should want to repent as soon as possible (Luke 13:3). Life is short and uncertain (James 4:13-15). Death is certain and will come to each one of us

sooner or later (Hebrews 9:27). We are going to be judged for our sins at the Last Day. Therefore, we should repent immediately! The apostle Peter wrote: *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9).

Dear Reader, what about you? Have you repented of your sins? Have you been baptized for the remission of your sins? If not, please do so today so that you will be prepared to meet the Lord.



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