

The Most Difficult Command?

by Wayne Goff

J.W. McGarvey once said that of all the gifts he wished he could have as a preacher, he wished for the ability to persuade men and women to repent. Is repentance the most difficult of all commands?

From personal experience as a gospel preacher, I would have to say that this one thing prevents more people from *becoming* Christians, or from *remaining faithful* as Christians, or from *being faithful unto death*.

Repentance has been defined as “the change of mind that leads to a change of life.” It’s not hard to understand, but because it involves *the human will* it is most difficult to do. People grow accustomed to a lifestyle, or a pattern of living, or even with a particular habit or even sin and are *quite uncomfortable* being told that they need to change. Add to that the fact that the consequences are not readily evident, and you have a recipe for spiritual disaster!

REPENT! AN URGENT APPEAL

These things being true, it is not surprising then that John the Baptist and Jesus Christ ushered in the new gospel era with the words: “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*” (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mk. 1:15). A *change of mind* leading to a *change of life* was not a suggestion, but a Divine command! I believe this is the chief reason why “*few*” will find eternal life (Matt. 7:14).

Jesus said repeatedly, “*I tell you, no; but unless you **repent** you will all likewise perish*” (Lk. 13:3, 5). After Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection, He told His apostles “*that **repentance** and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem*” (Lk. 24:47). And so it was.

The first gospel sermon after Jesus’ ascension back into heaven was a heart-piercing charge of having crucified the Son of God! Those who gladly received the truth asked what they should do, and Peter said with the rest of the apostles: “**Repent**, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). The same message was repeatedly shortly thereafter (Acts 3:19).

The apostle Paul arrived in Athens, Greece, the seat of ancient Greek wisdom and philosophy and declared: “*Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to **repent***” (Acts 17:31). All mankind must repent because all mankind has sinned against God (Romans 3:23). Paul made this abundantly clear and won only a few noble converts (Acts 17:34). But God is not about to change His mind or His plan for salvation because of man’s reticence. But it certainly does give credence to the view that repentance is the hardest command to obey.

TRUST & OBEY

“*For godly sorrow produces **repentance** leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death*” (2 Cor. 7:10). We will ultimately repent when we see the long-term damages of sin. We will repent when we are convicted in an honest heart that our deeds have harmed God, man, our loved ones, and ourselves. We just do not often get faced with the obvious in this regard. We are quite adept at dodging the issue. But “godly sorrow” is the deep conviction from God’s Word that we have done wrong and that we are facing serious consequences. A good heart cannot accept that fact without responding as it should. Though it may be most difficult, and though it may make you feel most uncomfortable to consider, when you do the right thing for the right reason, great dividends can be yours!

NOBODY CAN MAKE YOU!

Repentance is something that can be avoided until the Judgment Day. Jesus Himself found it quite frustrating, and we read in Matthew the following words: “*Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not **repent**: ‘Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon,*

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