The Most Difficult Command?

by Wayne Goff

*they would have **repented** long ago in sackcloth and ashes"* (11:20-21). So you see, even God cannot make you repent. As a free moral agent, that choice is yours and yours alone to make. The preacher can only try his best to persuade you to do what God says.

Preachers do not *enjoy* telling people that they need to change. But that is the message that needs to be told. The apostle Paul told the evangelist Timothy that *"a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them **repentance** so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will"* (2 Tim. 2:24-26). And again, from personal experience, following that biblical instruction is most difficult. It is so frustrating for preachers to preach the truth, and do it persuasively, only to see it fall on stubborn ears.

The Roman governor, Felix, expressed the feelings of most people when he heard Paul preach on *"righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come."* He said, *"Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you"* (Acts 24:25). In essence, Felix was saying, "I know you're right, Paul, but that's a tough thing to do right now. I will call for you when I'm ready to repent." But if Felix ever did repent, we do not know of it.

Finally, remember the humble words of Jesus: *"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to **repentance"*** (Lk. 5:32). Jesus can give rest from a guilty conscience, forgiveness to a sin-laden soul, and eternal hope for the future — regardless of the deeds done — if only we will humble ourselves before Him and turn away from the sinful thoughts and deeds in repentance (Matt. 11:28-30).

Let each of us open our Bibles, see ourselves in the light of God's Word, and repent of anything and everything that we may need to give up.

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