

A Bible Word: "Repentance"

by Wayne Goff

What is "repentance"?

"When used in the New Testament as a command to the alien in order to the remission of sins, it always indicates a change of mind as produces a change or reformation of life under circumstances warranting the conclusion that sorrow for the past would or had preceded it." [T.W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, p. 236].

"Repent" comes from the Greek word (metanoia) which is defined as a change of mind, a turning about, conversion. For the most part, repentance suggests the beginning of a new religion and moral life; a repentance that leads to God, Acts 20:21 [Arndt & Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the N.T.*, pp. 513-514].

In Matthew 3:8, when John the Baptist scolded the Jewish leaders with the words "bear fruits worthy of repentance!" he was using the very specific meaning of the word repentance in contrast to its results or fruit. But generally in the New Testament, the word "repent" or "repentance" has a more general meaning which includes both the change of mind and the resulting change of conduct (see Acts 2:38; Matt. 12:41).

Jesus very simply illustrated the meaning of "repentance" in a parable of two sons. Listen to it: "But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not." (Matthew 21:28-30, KJV). The first son at first refused to obey his father, but when he repented (changed his mind) he then went to work. So it is with all true repentance in the New Testament.

The Application

Repentance is that change of mind that we have about the sin we are practicing. Once God's truth convinces us of the wrong of any sin, then we will stop doing it because we are convinced that it is wrong. Show me the person who has a hard time changing from wrong to right, and I'll show you a person who doesn't really believe the sin he is committing is all that bad!

God tells us that sin separates us from Him, Isaiah 59:1-2. The first people on earth, Adam & Eve, were separated from God by sin when they were thrust out of the Garden of Eden where they had close fellowship with Him. So if we believe this is true, then we will stop sinning if we want to be loved by God and love in return.

The word "sin" may be a bit generic, but the New Testament contains lists of sins that we can study and discover what God considers to be wrong, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Colossians 3:5, 8. Once we find our pet sin in the list, then we may be less willing to actually repent of that sin. We might be tempted to justify ourselves (see Lk. 10:29) by making numerous excuses. You see, dear reader, repentance is hard work, but it pays great dividends now and eternally.

Of What Must You Repent?

You must repent of any and all sins identified in God's Word! Ignorance is no excuse. One sin is one sin too many! Sin, simply defined, is "a violation of God's Word." Violate God's Word and you have violated God's Person. One cannot do that, continue to do that, and be pleasing to God. He must repent.

Just remember: "For 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. Sin is a serious thing.

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