

The What, Why, and How of Repentance

~the late Herbert S. Ebersole

In the Old Testament, God spoke to the need of repentance. He also promised that the time would come when He would give the results of repentance – a new spirit and a soft heart. Very early in the New Testament, it became evident that repentance was of prime importance. Both John the Baptist and Jesus began their ministries by preaching repentance. If repentance was taken out of John's message, there would not be much left.

So today, the ax must be laid to the tree. The following illustration was given when I was a boy: "at a certain place they were having trouble with bad water. Various solutions were suggested, but they failed to produce pure water. Then, someone suggested to paint the pump." Too often, reforms, education, aid for the poor, and laws have been tried but results continue to be unsatisfactory without the change of heart. People will continue to run after the world, hold grudges, and live selfishly. Human nature wants God to give them what they want, follow them around, take care of them, and, of course, give them a promise of eternal life.

Repentance is always a change to do the right, a change of mind, and a change of masters. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." A new spirit and heart is a wonderful blessing because by nature, we were all what Paul describes in Titus 3:3-5. "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Repentance became necessary because of man's prodigal ways and his willingness to excuse himself in them. At the same time, he would judge others.

The first move toward repentance is seen clearly in Job 42:1-6. Job begins to see God as holy, righteous, just, and having all power and authority. Then, he sees himself as vile and evil, needing cleansing that only God can give. In Isaiah 6, Isaiah, after seeing the vision of God, responded with "Woe is me." The thief on the cross acknowledged he was receiving the due reward for his deeds, but that Jesus had done nothing amiss.

Paul said the Thessalonians "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Repentance is always a turning from sin to a Holy God for mercy and pardon. Paul gives us a clear recipe for repentance in 2 Co 7:9-12. Repentance begins with a godly sorrow that will not be repented of. We dare not give up in our Christian life until we finish the pursuit that culminates in hatred of sin and replaces it with holiness of life. Often persons caught in various crimes are sorry they were found out, and they must pay for their misdeeds. The person whose repentance is genuine is sorry that he disobeyed the law, trespassed upon the rights of others, and sinned against God. The repentant one is willing to acknowledge his wrongs, see that punishment is due, and seek the mercy that may be offered. Let us look at 2 Corinthians 7:11. These are forceful words describing the feelings of a repentant person. "What carefulness it wrought in you," (what watchful interest); "Yea, what clearing of yourselves," (seeking to right the wrongs); "Yea, what

indignation,” (what anger at the sin and our rebellious heart); “Yea, what fear,” (holy respect for the just judgments of God); “Yea, what vehement desire,” (very earnest hopefulness to find victory over the sin); “Yea, what zeal,” (what ardent endeavor to live for God); “Yea, what revenge!” Could one use stronger or more forceful words? Dare we be expecting and encouraging less? Half-hearted sorrow and repentance will only produce half-hearted church members who cannot be victorious. Why would not the repentant person seek with all his will and energy to serve the living Savior who made possible his redemption?

Revelation 2 and 3 give us Christ’s message to the churches. These messages reveal the deceitfulness of sin and man’s heart in that five out of seven churches were told to repent.

If repentance was not evident, Christ would remove the candlestick of Ephesus, fight against Pergamos with the sword of His mouth, bring great tribulation upon Thyatira, come as a thief to Sardis, and He would spew the Laodiceans out of His mouth. From these alternatives, we ought to sense the seriousness of becoming lukewarm and allowing the world to crowd in upon our love and devotion to Christ. The apostle Paul said he kept back nothing but went “from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (acts 20:20,21). When questioned about the Galileans who were killed by Pilate, Jesus said that all must repent or the alternative is eternal destruction. Two times Jesus repeats the same words “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3,5). The days of Jesus were important days. There were many things happening, but Jesus brought men’s attention to the crux of the issue. He said, “Ye must be born again”, “Except ye repent”, “Enter in at the strait gate”, and “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” May God help us to be as convinced as Christ was and move with purpose. May the result be that those whom our lives touch will not only have repented, but they will continue to have a repentant attitude and will live a holy life by the grace of God. “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb 12:1b-2a).

~ Pensacola FL
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