

A STUDY OF BIBLICAL REPENTANCE

It has been aptly remarked that repentance is the hardest command for man to perform. Belief is simple, just look at the creation and one sees proof of the Creator; confession is prompted by a strong belief; and water baptism, also a command for the non-Christian, is not difficult, being precipitated by belief (Jn. 8: 24; Rom. 10: 9, 10; Acts 2: 38; Gal. 5: 6). It is in the act of repentance that some of the most complete changes that involve man's basic thinking, will, and emotion take place, as we shall see. In this study of repentance, we shall explore the definition, the change of mind of repentance, and the fact repentance is a radical act.

The definition of repentance. In our efforts to define repentance in a practical way, let us begin by noticing comments on three of the Greek words that are rendered repentance in the New Testament, two verbs and one noun.

"Verb, *metanoëo*: lit., 'to perceive afterwards' (meta, 'after,' implying 'change,' *noëo*, 'to perceive;' *nous*, 'the mind, the seat of moral reflection'), in contrast to *pronoëo*, 'to perceive beforehand,' hence signifies 'to change one's mind or purpose,' always, in the NT, involving a change for the better, an amendment, and always, except in Luke 17: 3, 4, of 'repentance' from sin.

Verb, *metamelomai*: meta, as in No. 1, and melo, 'to care for,' is used in the Passive Voice with the Middle Voice sense, signifying 'to regret, to repent oneself,' Matt. 21: 29, RV, 'repented himself;' Matt. 21: 32, RV, 'ye did (not) repent yourselves' (AV, "ye repented not"); Matt. 27: 3, 'repented himself' 2 Cor. 7: 8 (twice), RV, 'regret' in each case; Heb. 7: 21, where alone in the NT it is said (negatively) of God.

Noun *metanoia*: 'afterthought, change of mind, repentance' is used of 'repentance' from sin or evil. As regards 'repentance' from sin, (a) the requirement by God on man's part is set forth, e.g., in Matt. 3: 8; Luke 3: 8; Acts 20: 21; 26: 20; (b) the

mercy of God in giving 'repentance' or leading men to it is set forth, e.g., in Acts 5: 31; 11: 18; Rom. 2: 4; 2 Tim. 2: 25. The most authentic mss. omit the word in Matt. 9: 13; Mark 2: 17, as in the RV. In the NT the subject chiefly has reference to 'repentance' from sin, and this change of mind involves both a turning from sin and a turning to God. The parable of the Prodigal Son is an outstanding illustration of this. Christ began His ministry with a call to 'repentance,' Matt. 4: 17, but the call is addressed, not as in the OT to the nation, but to the individual." (W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words).

It is imperative that we understand repentance. Repentance is set forth as being universally required. We read: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17: 30). It is either repent or perish (Lk. 13: 3, 5). God desires our repentance and is longsuffering in an effort to afford mankind the opportunity to repent and not perish (2 Pet. 3: 9).

Let us now consider what repentance is not. Repentance is not simply cessation from sin (Gen. 6: 6). Repentance is not simply sorrow for sin (2 Cor. 7: 10). Strictly considered, repentance is not within itself the source of faith, getting saved, or reformation of life (cp. Mk. 1: 15; Acts 2: 38; Matt. 21: 29).

What precisely is repentance? Beloved, repentance is, biblically viewed in the setting of salvation, a change of mind or will that is produced by godly sorrow and the goodness of God that results in a change or reformation of life (Matt. 21: 29; 2 Cor. 7: 10, Rom. 2: 4; Matt. 21: 29).

The word of God is the instrument that produces repentance. The reason why we should experience godly sorrow (having sorrow such as God has for sin) and the viewing of God's goodness are seen in the word of God (Jas. 1: 14-17; Jn. 3: 16). The word convicts us of our sins; hence, the reason for repentance (Acts 2: 14-41).

Repentance, a change of mind explored. As we have seen in the complete definition of repentance, repentance involves a change of mind or will (Matt. 21: 29). God wants to influence and control our thinking (for the better, 2 Cor. 10: 5; Phil. 4: 8). I am not suggesting that in the following that man immediately and initially experiences a distinct, observable, and definitional change in the following particulars as man comes to God. However, the change of mind produced by repentance does, in its totality, involve change in the following areas:

When one repents, one experiences change regarding sin. They no longer love darkness and error but love light and truth (Jn. 3: 19). They are willing to surrender their will to God and thus view God differently (Heb. 12: 28). They realize their own sinfulness and cease being selfish (Rom. 3: 23; 2 Cor. 5: 15). They respect the word of God and desire to obey it (Acts 2: 337-42). Repentance produces change in how we view Satan, others, money, work, and life in general (I Pet. 5: 8; Matt. 7: 12; I Tim. 6: 10; Col. 3: 22, 23; I Pet. 3: 10, 11).

Repentance, a radical act. By "radical" I do not mean fanatical but drastic. Drastic is relative and in this sense, good. Allow me to demonstrate what I mean.

The son when first approached by his father to work in the vineyard refused (Matt. 21: 28 ff.). However, we read that "he went." What was there that caused the important change? "He answered and said, I will not: but afterward repented, and went" (Matt. 21: 29). Some of the Jews who crucified Christ later became Christians who worshipped and served Christ. Repentance brought about this radical change (Acts 2: 23, 36, 37-41, 42, 44, 46). Saul of Tarsus had persecuted Christians and had them murdered, but then became a servant of Jesus Christ himself, the great apostle Paul (Acts 9: 12). What caused this change in Saul's life? Saul repented (Acts 9: 3-18, repentance is necessarily inferred, Acts 2: 38). The Philippian jailer who was a pagan had charge of Paul and Silas in prison. Later he is found washing their stripes and feeding them in his house (Acts 16: 33,

34). Repentance drastically changed his thinking regarding himself, Paul, and Silas (Acts 16: 30 ff.).

Repentance will also result in consequential changes today in a person's life. Repentance will cause the person who has a foul mouth to use pure speech; the thief to cease his stealing, and the drunkard to forsake the bottle (Eph. 4: 28; Eph. 4: 28; Prov. 23: 29 ff.). Repentance also involves restitution, as is seen in the case of Zacchaeus (Lk. 19: 8-10). Money that is stolen will not be retained but returned, when repentance is present. The adulterer will return the wife of another man or will cease his adultery with a woman to whom he has no scriptural right (Matt. 19: 9). There will be no "if I have sinned" or "I sinned but," when repentance is truly experienced. Repentance pervades every fiber of our being and soul and can truly transform us into a mindset that receives and loves the word of God and will obey it at all costs (I Jn. 5: 3, 2: 3 ff.).

In conclusion, repentance is not just an isolated act that is performed when one initially comes to God. Repentance is ongoing (2 Cor. 7: 8 ff.). I shall close by quoting what Paul said repentance produced in a people who had before been spiritually indifferent: "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter" (2 Cor. 7: 11).

Note: The same Greek verb *metamelomai* is used to describe the change in thinking characteristic of the son and of Judas as well (Matt. 21: 29; 27: 3). Judas obviously experienced regret and a consequent change of mind; however, his "repentance" appears to have only involved regret and a change in mind that did not positively manifest itself in making himself right with God (Acts 1: 25). In the case of Judas, suicide was the result of his change in mind (Matt. 27: 5). Initial repentance must be guided by God's word and continue to result in obedience to God; not simply being engulfed in sorrow. (by **Don Martin**)