

## God Demands a Life of Turning to Him – Repentance

*“except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:3)*

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There are certain demands made by God and to them man must comply (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). One requirement of the Lord is for man to turn from his sins. Jesus said, "...except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). It could not be stated with greater clarity, man must repent of sin or perish (in hell). "Turn or burn" is the commonly stated gist set forth in this passage. Turn from sin and turn to God or suffer the consequences. And those consequences will not be pleasant--the Bible is emphatic about that.

Turning to God was the basic message proclaimed by John the Baptizer as he prepared the way for the Savior, Jesus Christ. He proclaimed "...Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). The Son of God proclaimed the exact same theme as he told of the coming of His kingdom (Matthew 4:17). The disciples of the Lord were also sent forth to call men to repentance (a turning from sin to live a life of righteousness, Mark 6:7,12). As a matter of Biblical fact, God wants that message taught in every nation on this globe until the end of time (Luke 24:47; Acts 17:30-31).

### Repentance Defined

What does it mean to repent? Does it mean to confess our sins? In Matthew 21:28-29 Jesus provides an excellent explanation of repentance: "But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not; but afterward he repented, and went." From this passage we see that repentance is not a confession of sin, but it is a change of thinking and action. The son first said "no" to the father, but then changed his mind, went and worked in the vineyard as he was directed to do. Clearly, it is a change from disobedience to obedience. It was a change of heart that led to a change of action. This is repentance.

The Ninevites are another example of repentance. Of them our Lord said, "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here" (Matthew 12:41). What did the Ninevites do to show repentance? The book of Jonah tells the entire account. Nineveh was a very wicked city (Jonah 1:1-2). Jonah was a prophet who was sent to denounce their wickedness and inform them that they would be overthrown in forty days (Jonah 3:1-4). Because they believed the pointed preaching of Jonah, they put on sackcloth and ashes and afflicted themselves with fasting. They also determined to cry out mightily to God and turn from their evil ways (Jonah 3:5-9). God saw their works and decided not to send the disaster He had planned for them (Jonah 3:10). The entire city realized the imminent danger and turned themselves fully toward the one and only God of heaven. This is what it means to repent.

Repentance is a requisite; no sins will be removed until man repents. Peter said, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall

come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). Notice the word "converted" in this verse. This clearly indicates a complete change. To convert American dollars to Mexican pesos necessitates giving up one form of currency for another. Repentance demands that man give up one form of living for another. The man who repents will give up all sinful living and will turn to living righteously as the Bible instructs. God's word teaches "...us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:12). When man quits sinning and begins to live the way God requires, his sins can be forgiven.

### **Repentance Demonstrated**

In our study thus far, we have looked at the definition of repentance. We now wish to examine a few Biblical cases of repentance (the Ninevites represent one example; there are many more found in the Holy Scriptures). The Thessalonians provide a model case of repentance: "For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Previous to hearing the Gospel these people worshiped idols, a grievous sin in the eyes of God (Revelation 21:8). However, through being taught the way of truth, they changed their minds and changed their actions. The Thessalonians ceased the sinful practice of idolatry and began serve the only true God. They repented of idolatry by turning to God.

The Corinthians also demonstrated repentance. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Paul cited a short list of sins for which man would be eternally lost. That list included: fornication, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, stealing, covetousness, drunkenness, reviling and extortion. The Corinthians had previously been guilty of committing these sins. But Paul indicates a change in the Corinthian's behavior when he said, "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (v.11). They had been practicing each one of these sins, but had stopped after obeying the Gospel. They had turned to God's perfect law of liberty as their standard of living (James 1:25). They showed their repentance by their change of behavior. If they had not changed, their souls would have eventually been lost due to the fact that the unrighteous cannot occupy the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9).

Claims of repentance are worthless without demonstrating a changed life. John the Baptizer challenged his listeners to "Bring forth fruits meet for repentance" (Matthew 3:8). In other words, show that you have repented; do something that indicates you have changed. If a person repents of using vulgar language, then he must stop using such language. If a person repents of drinking alcohol, then that person must cease buying and drinking beer, wine, whiskey, and other types of hard liquor. When an individual repents of the sin of forsaking the assembly, he must become regular in attendance. On Sunday he needs to be present and accounted for in Bible class, worship and evening worship. On Wednesday evening he needs to be in Bible class.

I remember a sister who once came forward on Sunday morning repenting of forsaking the assembly. She desired the prayers of the church that she would be forgiven of God for this sin. But, at 6:00 p.m. when Sunday evening services rolled around, she was nowhere to be seen. The same thing happened on the following Wednesday when she did not show up for Bible class. The next Sunday she was absent again. Question: "Did she repent?" Let's ask it another way, "Did she

change?" The answer is simple and short, "no," she did not. Nothing changed in her practice, therefore she did not repent. She regretted her behavior, but she did not bring forth any type of fruit that indicated repentance. Unfortunately, this is the attitude of many. Though they regret doing wrong, no change is forthcoming. As the Lord once said, "...the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

### **Repentance Is A Personal Responsibility**

God is not going to change us—we must change ourselves. Jesus said, "... but except **ye** repent, **ye** shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, emphasis mine RM). Jesus taught that it is our personal responsibility to stop sinning and to live righteously. God is not going to do it for us. The same was true when we were children and our father or mother told us to stop acting badly. They ordered us to improve our demeanor—"straighten up!"—they would say. If we persisted to misbehave they would warn us—"stop it or else!" Good parents even resorted to spanking if we refused to change (Proverbs 22:15). But in the end it was up to us to make the necessary changes. Changing improper behavior was our decision, not our parents. This is true with sinful actions, turning to God is up to each individual.

Mom and Dad cannot repent for us. The preacher cannot repent for us. Neither the wife nor can the husband repent for the other. It is the personal responsibility of each and every person on earth to do their own repenting. As Paul preached to the Athenian audience, he said, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30). All men everywhere are given a divine command to make a change. Turn from sin and obey God's divine will. The question each of us needs to ask ourselves is: "Have I repented of my sins?"

### **Repentance Is Difficult**

One of the hardest commands for man to obey is that of repentance. A lot of people have heard the preaching of the Gospel and believed that Jesus is the Son of God (Romans 10:16-18; John 20:30-31). Thousands upon thousands have been baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). But not as many have repented of their sins. This writer has seen people gladly accept the Gospel, confess their belief that Jesus is the Son of God, and go down into the waters of baptism. But, they rise from the waters of baptism never to be seen again. They did not come to church, join in the work, grow spiritually nor do anything else that a Christian is required to do. They went back to living life as they had before baptism. It is useless to be baptized unless one repents. Peter said, "Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins..." (Acts 2:38). It takes both repentance and baptism for the Lord to erase our sins. You could walk the isle at church a hundred times, but without repentance it is a waste of time.

Repentance is very difficult. One reason it is so hard is because sin becomes a habit and habits are hard to break. Example: if we like staying up late on Saturday night and sleeping late on Sunday morning this makes it hard to get to Bible class on Sunday morning. The easy (but wrong) thing to do is just stay home and miss Bible class. Sleeping late on Sunday morning is a habit that Christians must change. Before becoming a Christian, people rarely pray, but after being baptized into Christ one must make changes. Again, habits must be changed, which is not always easy.

Or, cheating can be a habit; it must be changed when one serves the Lord. We may have the habit of spending all of our wages on ourselves. These habits are often difficult to change.

Another reason it is so hard to repent is because our bodies can become addicted to sinful behavior--i.e. alcoholic beverages, tobacco, illegal drugs, fornication and so on. Another element that makes it hard to repent is that we can become emotionally attached to sin. For instance, in the case of adultery, a man might actually come to love his mistress. He can fall in love with her making it very hard to turn away from the act of adultery. These are a few of the reasons why repentance is one of the hardest commands man is called upon to obey.

### **Conclusion**

In our study we have observed the following about repentance: the definition, the demonstration, the personal responsibility and the difficulty. Each of us must realize the importance of doing this on a continual basis. Throughout life corrections will need to be made. Each time we recognize that we are out of line with the word of God change will be required. Let us not hesitate to make the corrections that will bring us back in harmony with the Bible. Do not be too proud to say, "I've made mistakes, I have sinned." The Bible says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9). Turning to God benefits us in eternity.