

REPENTANCE

REPENTANCE is from a Greek word “metanoes” meaning to have another mind, to change the mind. It is used in the New Testament to indicate a change of mind and heart, in respect to sin, God and self. Repentance is not an act separate from faith, but saving faith includes and implies that change of mind, which is called repentance. See Acts 17:30, 31. Feelings relative to repentance are diverse. One is contrite about sin and failure, and glad about change of mind and heart in regard to same. See 2 Cor. 7:8-11.

Conscience can convict of sin (see John 8:9), but conviction is spiritually meaningful only when of the Holy Spirit of God (John 16:7-11), who will not always strive with man (try to convince) - see Gen. 6:3. “Behold, now is the accepted time ... now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2).

Salvation is the great inclusive word of the Bible, gathering into itself all the redemptive acts and processes. “Born again” (new birth) is a Greek word, which in English is also translated as “regeneration.” Therefore “being born again” or “regenerated” (Titus 3:5,6), is a creative act of God, the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8), within one who believes. Altho one may not have great understanding, one can trust and know thru believing faith (see Eph. 2:8,9). Like the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:30-34), one may be saved on the basis of very simple knowledge. But faith and belief in the Person and Work of Christ on Calvary are essential. Romans 10:9,10 indicates believing involves trust, assent of the mind and the heart.

Salvation involves trusting and not feeling. We can BE SURE! The Psalmist spoke great truth (130:5) - “... in His Word do I hope.” The Apostle John says “These (the Scriptures) are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name” (John 20:31). “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). “Faith-cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17). It is not the amount or strength of our faith - what counts is the worthiness of Him, the object of our faith (1 Peter 2: 24; 2 Cor, 5:21; Heb. 7:25).

Only one sin separates from salvation thru Christ - unbelief. Failure to believe God will be disastrous forever and forever. (Read John 3:18, 32). During a great storm at sea the Apostle Paul received word from God, and declared to his shipmates, “I believe God” (Acts 27:25). God speaks to you thru the Bible - do you believe God?

UNDERSTANDING REPENTANCE

There seems to be some confusion about the words “repent” and “repentance” and how they relate to salvation. The Bible tells us in Mark 6:12 that the twelve apostles preached that people should repent. Luke 13:3-5 tells us that unless we repent we shall perish. But what does it mean to “repent”?

The Greek words “metanoeo” and “metanoia” which are translated “repent” and “repentance”, are used all fifty-eight times in the New Testament when repentance is linked to salvation. Both words mean basically the same thing - “to change your mind; reconsider; or to think differently.”

The next question we need to ask is “to think differently about what?” About sin? About God? About yourself? Lets look at scripture for the answer. But first think about what the unsaved man thinks is required to get to Heaven: church membership, church attendance, tithing, being good or some other form of good works.

In Mark 1:15 Jesus tells us to “Repent, and believe in the gospel.” That’s the answer! To change our mind, to reconsider, to think differently about what is required of us to get to Heaven! All we have to do is believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ! Of course, the moment we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and then He guides us and convicts us to change our mind in other areas, such as sin, God and self.

Some will tell you “to repent” means to “feel sorry for” or “to turn from” your sins. If that’s true, then how sorry do you have to feel? Sorry enough to be sad? Sorry enough to cry? Sorry enough to beg forgiveness? And how far do you have to turn? Ninety degrees? One hundred-eighty degrees? Any time someone tells you that you have to do something that can be measured to be saved, disregard it because it smells like smoke and comes from the pit of Hell. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of Works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved (Acts 16:31). Notice there is no degree to believing, either you do or you don’t.

Maybe the confusion lies in the fact that the Hebrew word “nacbam” in the Old Testament which is translated “repent” does mean “to be sorry, be moved to pity, have compassion.” But this word is never used in the context of salvation. “Repent” is also found seven more times in the New Testament, translated from the Greek word “metamellomai” , which means to “regret”, but it is never used in the context of salvation.

As you read your Bible, if you will ascribe the original meaning of repent, “change your mind and believe the gospel” to the words “repent” and “repentance” when dealing with salvation, you’ll find that it fits every time.

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REPENT! ABOUT WHAT?

I saw a cartoon the other day in which a scraggly old man was carrying a placard which said, "Repent. The end is near (provided we can get the paperwork done)!" If you asked several people about the meaning of repent in this quip, the answers might be as numerous as the people.

Our Lord preached repentance (Matthew 4:17). So did Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38). So can we, if we clearly understand what it means.

Repent, like other words in our Christian vocabulary, has a basic, generic meaning which has to be pinned down more specifically whenever it is used. Salvation is such a word. Saved from what? From imprisonment in Rome? That's the way Paul used it in Philippians 1:19. From eternal condemnation? That's the way Peter used it in Acts 4:12. Redeem is another such word. It means to purchase. Purchase what? A field in Matthew 13:44. Our salvation in 2 Peter 2:1.

Repent means to change one's mind. But we need to ask, "What do you change your mind about?" An individual can genuinely repent about things which have nothing to do with eternal salvation. Such repentance is not necessarily superficial, but neither is it saving. Do you remember the story our Lord told about the two sons (Matthew 21:28-32)? One said he would do his father's bidding but did not. The other said he would not, but later repented and obeyed. His repentance had nothing to do with salvation; it meant he went to work in his father's vineyard. This was no superficial repentance. It resulted in a change of actions. But it did not bring eternal life.

But there is a repentance which saves eternally. What kind of repentance is that? Not a sorrow for sins or even a change of mind that decides to clean up one's life. Tears about the past or new resolutions about the future do not save. A sense of sorrow and need may stir up a person's mind or conscience so that he or she realizes the need for the Savior; but if there is no change of mind about Jesus Christ there can be no salvation.

And that's what saving repentance is - changing your mind about Jesus Christ. Whatever you thought of Him formerly, good or not so good, you now replace with acceptance of Him as the one who paid the penalty for your sins. In saving repentance we turn from whatever conception we had of Jesus Christ and turn to Him as our Savior from sin. That brings salvation. Repentance is not a precondition to faith; it is an inseparable facet of faith. To change one's mind about Christ as Savior is to believe in Him.

Sometimes the Bible uses repentance in connection with the Christian life. Christians need to repent. In the case of the man at Corinth who sinned and who, changed by the discipline of the church, came back to the Lord, the church was overly harsh on him, not being willing to restore him to full fellowship (2 Corinthians 7:9-11). Paul exhorted the church to repent of its harsh stand and receive the man again in fellowship.

In 2 Timothy 2:25 Paul plainly states that Christians, or at least professing Christians, need to repent of sins in their lives, particularly those connected with promoting and accepting teachings of false teachers.

In the letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor is a cluster of exhortations to Christians to repent. The Ephesians were warned to repent over their loss of first love (Revelation 2:5), those in Thyatira of their immorality (2:21-22), those in Sardis of their deadness (3:3), and the Laodeceans of their lukewarmness (3:19). Clearly, Christians need to repent and change their minds and actions about any number of sins.

To sum up: Is repentance a condition for receiving eternal life? Yes, if it is repentance or changing one's mind about Jesus Christ. But no, if it means to be sorry for sin or even to resolve to turn from sin.

Is repentance a precondition to faith? Must the sinner turn from his sin in order to believe? Must he or she turn from sin in order to receive the Savior? To these questions the uniform answer is no. Our Lord came to seek and save those who are lost (Luke 19:10), simply because those who are healthy do not need a physician (Matthew 9:12).

Everyone who believes repents (changes his mind and relationship to the Lord). But not everyone who repents (changes his mind about any number of things, including sin), is necessarily saved. So when you ask someone to repent, be sure you direct the change toward the Lord, so that the person will acknowledge and receive Him as his own Savior from sin.